

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



ANNUAL REPORTS



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ORDER OF BUSINESS

- Notes:**
- (i) Business commences at 10am on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. There are business sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings.**
 - (ii) Communion will be held on Thursday at 12.30pm**
 - (iii) Figures in brackets refer to page numbers in the Annual Reports.**

Tuesday

OPENING OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

GA Business Committee – Initial Report

Presbyteries

Social Witness

General Council (Section 1)

Trustees

General Council (Section 2)

Public Affairs

Wednesday

General Council (Section 3)

Memorials

Councils not presenting verbally

Reconfiguration of Ministry

INSTALLATION OF NEW MODERATOR

Mission in Ireland

Thursday

Private Session – Judicial Commission etc.

Training in Ministry

General Council (Section 4)

GA Business Committee – Final Report

Communion Service

TUESDAY, JUNE 10

Assembly Buildings

Refreshments will be available prior to business

10am

Opening of the General Assembly

Constitution of the Assembly and Opening Worship

10.45am

1. Reception of Visiting Delegates

11.45am

2. GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE:
Initial Report and Resolutions 1–5 (pages 3 and 285)
3. REPORTS OF PRESBYTERIES
Reports and Resolutions (pages 114–120 and 289)

12pm

4. COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS:
Report and Resolutions (pages 121–152 and 289–290)

1pm

Lunch

2pm

5. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 1 of Report and Resolutions 6–9 (pages 1–30 and 285–286)
Executive Summary and Introduction; General Assembly Structures and Resources Panel; Ministerial Training Review Panel.

Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.

6. GENERAL ASSEMBLY TRUSTEES
Report and Resolutions (pages 153–155 and 290)

3.45pm *Refreshment Break*

4.30pm

7. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 2 of Report and Resolutions 10–18 (pages 31–55 and 287)
United Appeal Committee; Support Services Committee; PCI Pensions Scheme Review Panel

5.30pm REFLECTIVE WORSHIP

6pm *Dinner*

7.30pm

8. COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS:
Report and Resolutions (pages 156–175 and 290–291)

8.30pm *Close*

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11

Refreshments will be available prior to business

10am

9. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 3 of Report and Resolutions 19–25 (pages 56 and 100)
General Assembly Advisory Committee; Communications Review and PCI Website; Guysmere Panel; Doctrine Committee
10. MEMORIALS:
Report and Resolutions (pages 176–182 and 291–292)
Carnmoney Kirk Session; First Bangor Kirk Session; Armagh Presbytery; Down Presbytery

Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.

11. Reports not presented verbally:
LINKAGE COMMISSION Report and Resolutions (pages 183–196 and 292–293); COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS: Report and Resolutions (pages 197–216 and 293); COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION: Report and Resolutions (pages 217–228 and 293–294)

12.30pm REFLECTIVE WORSHIP

1pm *Lunch*

2pm

12. LISTENING TO THE GLOBAL CHURCH

3pm

13. MERGERS AND RECONFIGURATION OF MINISTRY (LINKAGE REPORTS)
Report and Resolutions (pages 191–192 and 293)

3.45pm *Short Intermission (Assembly seated by 4.15pm)*

4.30pm

14. INSTALLATION OF NEW MODERATOR

5.30pm *Dinner Break
(Including Assembly Reception for invited guests)*

7.30pm

15. COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND
Report and Resolutions (pages 229–269 and 294)

9pm *Close*

Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.

THURSDAY, JUNE 12

Refreshments will be available prior to business

10am

16. PRIVATE SESSION

Judicial Commission: Report and Resolutions (pages 270–272 and 294); Special Commission Report and Resolution (pages 273 and 295); Commission on Applications Report and Resolution (pages 274 and 295); Council for Training in Ministry (Private Business); GA Structures and Resources Review Panel (Additional Report in Private); Any additional business referred to the Private Session

17. COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY (Public): Report and Resolutions (pages 275–284 and 295–297)

18. GENERAL COUNCIL: Section 4 of Report and Resolutions 26–27 (pages 101–113 and 289) Guidelines Review Panel; Nominations Committee; Final report of GA Business Committee

12.15pm Intermission

12.30pm

19. Assembly Communion Service

CLOSE OF ASSEMBLY

Times in brackets may be anticipated but should not be passed.

REVISED GUIDE TO ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE

Using this Guide

In this guide you will find definitions and explanations of important elements of the General Assembly.

If you want to know how to do something at the Assembly such as asking a question:

- *You will also find practical guidance in boxes with bullet points.*

Each section finishes with guidance in italics about where to find further information.

Reports of Councils and Commissions

Almost all of the time of the General Assembly is taken up with the reports of councils and commissions, as they report on what they have been doing throughout the year and what they hope to do in the future.

These reports are contained in the Annual Reports, or 'blue book', and have been issued electronically with the hard copy being available for collection at registration. It is important to read the reports in advance.

The Assembly cannot carry out the work of the Church directly, so it entrusts this to different councils and commissions.

Councils normally have a number of committees working under them, so there are separate sections in council reports for the work of these committees.

A commission has been entrusted with the power of the Assembly in its particular area of responsibility.

Members of councils and commissions are appointed by the Assembly itself. These appointments are contained in the Nominations Committee report of the General Council. A separate booklet is printed with the names being proposed to the Assembly. Councils and commissions are led by a convener, and supported by a secretary.

At the start of each session, a member of the Assembly (usually the convener of the council or commission) will speak about the written report and propose the resolutions – this is known as 'presenting' the report. Then another member of that council or commission will speak and will second the resolutions.

If the council or commission needs to report some things that happened after the main report was written, these are included in the Supplementary Reports booklet - this should be read in conjunction with the main blue book.

Every report must be 'received' by the Assembly. This does not mean that the Assembly agrees with everything that the report says, nor that it accepts responsibility for what a report contains. Rather, it means that the council or commission has presented its report to the Assembly in an acceptable way, and that the Assembly has received the report from the council or commission. The report does not have the authority of the Assembly, only that of the council or commission.

If a member of the Assembly believes that something important is not covered in any of the existing resolutions from a council or commission, they can submit an additional resolution.

From the 2023 Assembly, some reports are only presented in written form (GA Reports 2021 p117 Recommendation 3c).

These reports will normally be formally proposed and seconded without speeches. There will be opportunity for genuine questions for clarification (as on page ix below). Debate on the resolutions will only be permitted by the Moderator where a resolution is being opposed or an amendment considered. If debate takes place, it will follow the process outlined below.

In 2025, the following council reports will be presented in this format on DAY, SESSION – NAME COUNCILS.

If you want to submit an additional resolution:

- You should send the additional resolution to the Clerk of the Assembly in writing at least one week before the Assembly – email to clerk@presbyterianireland.org
- You will need a proposer and seconder for the resolution. If you are a member of the Assembly, you are able to propose or second it yourself. If you are not a member of the Assembly, you may 'present' a resolution, but only Assembly members can propose and second.
- If you want to rescind or reverse a previous decision of the Assembly then you must give notice of this at one annual meeting of the General Assembly, and then bring your resolution to the next annual meeting.

You can find further information on councils and committees in the Code Pars 268–310.

You can find further information on reports and resolutions in Pars III–V of the General Assembly’s Standing Orders and the Code Pars 144–7.

Ordering of Business

Each session of business is normally ordered in the following sequence:

- Speech by the proposer of a report and accompanying resolutions
- Speech by the seconder
- Questions
- Debate on each resolution
 - Speeches may be made about the resolution
 - Amendments may be proposed, although this is the exception
 - Speech by proposer of the amendment
 - Speech by seconder of the amendment
 - Questions about the amendment
 - Debate about the amendment
 - Closing speech by the proposer or seconder of the amendment
 - Vote to make the amendment the substantive resolution
 - which will still need to be debated and voted on
 - The proposer or seconder may close debate on the resolution with a speech
 - Vote on the resolution
 - Any dissent is recorded
- Debate on the final resolution ‘That the report be received,’ following the same sequence as above.

Questions

After the report has been presented and seconded, there is an opportunity for questions to be asked about anything in the reports and speeches.

Questions must be strictly asking for information about something in the report or speeches, or something not in the report but on a topic under the council’s or commission’s area of responsibility. A question should not be asked to score a point, or to make a speech.

If you wish to ask a question:

- You can ask without giving any advance warning, but you will get a better answer if you submit your question in advance.
- If submitting your question in advance, you should write it out and place it in the box provided at the front of the hall, or you can submit it by email to *deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org*.
- You should do this at least 15 minutes before the report in question. The more notice you give of a question, the more time there will be for the person responding to provide you with a full and accurate answer.
- Make sure that you are sitting in the main part of the hall, not the public gallery.
- Before asking your question, you should come up to the front in good time, and sit in the seats reserved for speakers, close to the microphone. By doing so, the Moderator will know that you want to speak and will invite you to do so when it is your turn – don't wait in your own seat.
- If the Moderator stands up again to speak while you are speaking, you must stop and listen to the Moderator.
- Normally, no one is able to ask more than two questions on any report, and the total time for questions is limited to 10 minutes.

You can find more information on Questions in the Code Par 153.

Debate

After questions have been asked and answered, the resolutions from the council or commission are debated and voted on one at a time. The resolutions are numbered and printed in the Resolution Booklet.

In the debate, speeches are made either in support of, or in opposition to a resolution.

The final resolution of every report is 'that the report be received.' This is the opportunity for speeches to be made (but not ask questions about) on any matters in the report or for which the council or commission should bear responsibility, but which are not included in any previous resolution.

If you wish to speak in a debate:

- Make sure that you are sitting in the main part of the hall, not the public gallery.
- Come up to the front in good time and sit in the seats reserved for speakers, close to the microphone. By doing so, the Moderator will know that you want to speak and will invite you to do so when it is your turn – don't wait in your own seat.
- If the Moderator stands up again to speak while you are speaking, you must stop and listen to the Moderator.
- To make sure everyone has a fair chance to speak, you can only speak once to each resolution, and there is a strict time limit on speaking. Those who present and second reports and resolutions are normally allowed up to **seven minutes**; other speeches are usually limited to **four minutes**, although these timings may be reduced by the Moderator if there is a backlog of business. There are two lights to help you know when your time is running out. The red light turns solid and a buzzer sounds when your time is up. You must stop speaking at this point.

You can find further information on Debate in the Code Par 148–155.

Voting

When the Moderator thinks that a resolution has been sufficiently debated, they will move the Assembly to vote on it. Only voting members can vote.

There are three ways a vote can happen :

- Most votes are voice votes. The Moderator will ask everyone in favour of the resolution to say 'Aye', and then ask everyone opposed to it to say 'No'.
- If the voice vote is close, then the Moderator may call for a standing vote. First, everyone in favour will be asked to stand while holding up their voting cards. Then everyone opposed will be asked to stand while holding up their voting cards. A rough count will be taken by the Moderator. Only people on the ground floor of the hall can vote. Anyone in the public gallery will not be able to vote, so it is important that you are seated on the ground floor.

- If this vote seems close, then the Moderator may call for a card vote. When you arrive at the Assembly, you will have been given a voting card with tear-off strips for yes and no. During the vote, tellers will move throughout the ground floor with voting boxes. Put one voting strip into the box – either yes or no. The tellers will then count the votes and report the result to the Moderator.

Sometimes, the Moderator may decide to go straight to a card vote. A card vote must happen if 25 people ask for it.

Proxy voting for a member of the Assembly who cannot be present is not allowed.

You can find further information on Voting in the Code Pars 156–160.

Dissent

After a vote, you may disagree with a decision the Assembly has made.

If you feel very strongly that a bad decision has been made, then you can register your dissent in the minutes. However, if you are a minister or elder, even when you disagree, you still have a responsibility to loyally implement the decisions of the Assembly.

If you wish to register your dissent:

- Speak to the Deputy Clerk immediately after the vote has taken place.
- You can then sign a statement that the Deputy Clerk will print, which says that you dissent from the decision the Assembly has just taken.
- This is then recorded in the minutes.

You can find further information on Dissent in the Code Pars 104 and 160.

Amendments

As well as voting yes or no to resolutions, members of the Assembly can also amend resolutions.

An amendment is a change to the wording of a resolution. This may clarify what the resolution states or substantively change what is being proposed, but it cannot introduce another subject and it cannot be an outright negation of the original resolution.

When a valid amendment is proposed and seconded at the Assembly, then:

- Debate about the original resolution is paused
- The proposer and seconder may each give a speech about the amendment
- The Assembly may ask questions about the amendment in the same way as with a resolution
- The Assembly may debate the amendment
- Either the proposer or seconder may give a closing speech
- The Assembly votes on the amendment

If the vote on the amendment passes, then the amendment becomes the substantive resolution and debate continues about whether to pass that amended resolution.

If the vote does not pass, then the original resolution is not altered and debate about it resumes.

If you want to propose an amendment:

- It was agreed for the 2023 and 2024 General Assemblies that: “Substantive proposed amendments which have not been submitted to the Business Committee for licensing in advance of the Assembly meeting, will only be permitted at the discretion of the Moderator, if they genuinely arise in the course of debate or if they relate to additional resolutions tabled in Supplementary Business. (Resolution 2(a), p.401)”. The General Council has agreed to bring the following resolution to the Assembly of 2025: “That at the 2025 General Assembly, and all subsequent General Assemblies, substantive proposed amendments, which have not been submitted to the Business Committee for licensing one week in advance of the Assembly meeting, will only be permitted, at the discretion of the Moderator, if they genuinely arise in the course of the debate, or if they relate to additional resolutions tabled in the Supplementary Business” (General Council Resolution 3).
- All supplementary business, including any proposed amendments etc., should be submitted to the Clerk in advance for licensing by 12 noon on Tuesday 3 June, 2025 at the latest.
- Any amendment must be submitted in writing to the Clerk of the Assembly. If an amendment genuinely arises in the course of debate, or if it relates to additional resolutions tabled in Supplementary Business, it must be submitted either in writing to the Clerk’s desk or by email to *deputyclerk@presbyterianireland.org*
- You must have a proposer and seconder for the amendment.
- You cannot introduce another subject in your amendment or propose outright negation of a resolution.
- If you speak to the proposer and seconder of the original motion in advance, they may accept your amendment without the Assembly voting on it. If it is not accepted and you still wish to propose the amendment then, if you notify the Clerk, it will appear in the Supplementary Reports. If an amendment is accepted before the Assembly starts, then the updated resolution can be distributed in Supplementary Reports.

You can find further information about amendments in the Code Pars 148–152 and Par VI of the General Assembly’s Standing Orders.

Memorials

Memorials are requests made to the Assembly, usually by a person or body who is not a member of the Assembly – a presbytery, a church member or group of members, or a group of people not connected with the Church. If you are not a member of the Assembly, you are able to bring a memorial.

Procedures and forms are laid down to be used in bringing memorials.

If you wish to submit a memorial:

- You should contact your Clerk of Presbytery or the Clerk of the General Assembly (clerk@presbyterianireland.org) for advice
- It is advisable to first present your memorial to a lower court of the church such as your Presbytery. If the lower court supports the memorial then you will be able to present it to the Assembly with their support. If they do not support the memorial it is less likely that the Assembly would be supportive.

You can find further information on Memorials in the Code Pars 147(5); 217(5)(a) and (b); 262.

Overtures

Overtures are special resolutions which are used to change the Code, which is the constitution of the Church.

Some overtures are printed in the blue book. If these are agreed by a two-thirds majority, they will be adopted immediately. Others which have not had such notice, will be adopted if no one votes against. If overtures do not achieve the preceding majorities, they are 'placed on the books' for one year, and decided on by the following Assembly. This also applies to the rules governing the Central Ministry Fund and other Ministry Funds.

In the Basic Code, where it's desirable that the proposed changes come into operation immediately, the change can be adopted temporarily during the intervening year as an 'Interim Act'. If an overture is submitted that would result in a significant constitutional change, it must also be sent to presbyteries to be voted on during the intervening year.

You can find further information on Overtures in the Code Pars 111 and 112.

Alternative Format Items

At each Assembly, one or two items of business will have an alternative format. This will often include presentations with speakers or videos which highlight the work of a council, for example, Global Mission Workers, or Mission in Ireland or Social Witness staff. Often there will be no formal resolutions or debates during these sessions, but they provide important updates on the work of the Church through its councils.

Further information on the General Assembly can be found in the Code Pars 97–112.

The Code is available at www.presbyterianireland.org/thecode

The General Assembly's Standing Orders can be found in the Code.

GENERAL COUNCIL SECTION 1

Convener: VERY REV DR D.J. BRUCE

Secretary: THE CLERK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The 2023 revisions to the structure of Committees, Panels and Task Groups facilitating the work of the General Council have proved successful. The Council met on 17 September 2024 (special meeting); 15 November 2024; 27 March 2025; 15 April 2025, and has called an additional special meeting on 6 May 2025.
2. The remit of the General Council is of such scope that its work will be taken across four sections during the three days of the General Assembly meeting, as follows:
3. **SECTION 1** (Tuesday 10 June, 2pm). The work of the **Structures and Resources Review Panel** will present an interim report. While the work of this Panel will continue, it is evident that all facets of the Church's central structures are being examined, to ensure that the necessary structures put in place match the needs, calling and capacity of the Church. The **Ministerial Training Review Sub-Panel** reports through the above Panel, and its work is ongoing. Likewise, the work of a sub-group seeking to address several significant matters concerning the **buildings and facilities at Union Theological College**, is ongoing, as is the **consideration of wider long-term issues relating to the Council for Social Witness**. It is however anticipated that a report on both of these matters will be included as part of the Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet and presented in the Private Session on the Thursday morning of the Assembly.
4. **SECTION 2** (Tuesday 10 June 4.30pm). The important work of the **United Appeal Committee** will be debated, including its recommendations for the Appeal in the incoming year. The Assembly will consider the report of the **Support Services Committee** which handles most of General Assembly's financial reporting, management systems and operational functions. The report of a **PCI Pensions Scheme Review Panel** will also be taken in this Section.
5. **SECTION 3** (Wednesday 11 June, 10am). The **General Assembly Advisory Committee** assists in framing a wide variety of business for the Council. This includes: a recommendation concerning the processing (if passed) of the Memorials of the Armagh and Down Presbyteries; an Affirmation of Fraternal and Confessional Relations with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (USA); matters relating to the allocation of funds

raised through the World Development Appeal between Tear Fund and Christian Aid; arrangements for the anticipated absence of the Clerk following his election as Moderator Designate; an examination with the Council for Social Witness of its provision of services, and other matters. A request that the ability of some Presbyteries to function effectively in the light of **Reconfiguration of Ministry** was also considered. The Council will recommend to the General Assembly, following a request from the Convener of the Linkage Commission, that authority be delegated for two years to the Council to merge or dissolve congregations on behalf of the General Assembly. A report on the work of a Task Group following the 2024 Memorial of two members of the Monaghan Presbytery on **Admission to Baptism** will be considered, with its recommendations. A major **review on communications** has been undertaken, led by Mark Neale, the Head of Communications, and this will be debated, along with updates on progress for the launch of a **new PCI website**. Reports will be taken from the **Guysmere Panel** and the **Doctrine Committee**.

6. **SECTION 4** (Thursday 12 June, following the private session). The **Guidelines Review Task Group** has examined the many decisions taken by the General Assembly over the last fifty years and categorised these as Regulations, Guidelines or Guidance. The **Nominations Committee** report will be taken, including thanks to outgoing Conveners, and the appointment of their successors. These key appointments are essential to the efficient and effective running of the work of Assembly Councils.
7. Without the committed work of the General Secretary's Department, many of the central functions of the Church could not be managed. The Council records its appreciation for the able assistance of the administrative team in the office, who act in support of the Council's work. The Council has been wisely steered by the General Secretary, Rev Dr Trevor Gribben, and the Deputy General Secretary, Rev Dr David Allen. They each serve the Church with dedication and deep commitment, far beyond the requirements of the role, and the entire Church is in their debt.
8. With news in February 2025 of the election of Dr Gribben as Moderator Designate, the Council made arrangements for the appointment of an Acting Clerk of the General Assembly and Acting General Secretary for the ensuing year. The Church will be well served by Rev Dr David Allen who assumes these responsibilities from 12 May 2025 until 31 August 2026. With some adjustments to his Clerkship responsibilities, he will also continue to take the lead role in the **Reconfiguration of Ministry** processes as overseen by the Linkage Commission.
9. The appointment of Dr Allen creates a vacancy, which, following an interview process, the Council filled at its meeting on 27 March 2025. Rev Peter Gamble was appointed by the Council as Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly, and Deputy General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

10. Looking to the future, the General Assembly will be asked to approve a Job Description and Personnel Specification with accompanying arrangements for the recruitment of a Clerk Designate to be formally appointed by the General Assembly in 2026, taking up their post from 1 September 2026.
11. With these agreed and proposed appointments in mind, the Council commends those who have taken up new or additional responsibilities and invites the wider Church to support them in prayer as they assume these roles.

INITIAL REPORT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE

1. The Business Committee has continued to review the work and arrangements of the General Assembly.
2. Last year's Assembly saw new formats for the Opening Meeting and the later Installation of the Incoming Moderator. These new services seem to have been well received and have now become our models of practice for future years. Following the decision of the General Assembly last year, the 2025 opening service will take place on Tuesday morning, 10 June at 10am. The Assembly will then continue until its conclusion on Thursday, 12 June. The service of Installation for the Incoming Moderator will be held at 4.30pm on Wednesday afternoon.
3. A Draft Order of Business for 2025 was drawn up by the Clerk on the basis agreed by the General Assembly and the Committee, with a final draft tabled at the General Council. This includes the following:
 - (a) All business sessions will commence each day at 10am (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday). There will be two scheduled evening sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday. Business is scheduled to conclude on Thursday morning and will be followed by the General Assembly Communion Service at 12.30pm. As in previous years, the General Council business is split over a number of sessions.
 - (b) There will be one 'alternative presentation' on Wednesday afternoon, 'Listening to the Global Church'.
 - (c) This year, additional worship sessions during General Assembly will be held on Tuesday at 5.30pm and on Wednesday at 12.30pm. There will be no Evening Celebration for 2025.
 - (d) As previously agreed by the 2021 General Assembly, some reports will be presented in written form only. These reports will normally be formally proposed and seconded without speeches. There will be the opportunity for genuine questions, in advance, for clarification. Debate on the resolutions will only be permitted by the Moderator where a resolution is being opposed or an amendment considered. This year, the reports of the Linkage Commission, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness and the Council for Global Mission will be presented in this format on Wednesday morning.

- (e) The current practice of livestreaming Assembly sessions, apart from the Private Session, continues.
- (f) The Private Session will be held on Thursday Morning at 10am

4. It was agreed for the 2023 General Assembly that:

‘Substantive proposed amendments which have not been submitted to the Business Committee for licensing in advance of the Assembly meeting will only be permitted at the discretion of the Moderator if they genuinely arise out of the debate or relate to additional resolutions tabled in the Supplementary Business.’ (Resolution 2(a), p40)

This was also agreed for the 2024 General Assembly. At a meeting of the General Council on 27 March, 2025 a Resolution to make these arrangements permanent for the General Assembly was agreed and is presented to this Assembly – see General Council Resolution 3.

- 5. The Business Committee agreed to review the original ‘Making the Assembly more Accessible Task Group’ decisions when the five-year trial period was completed. Therefore, the revision by the Business Committee will commence after the 2025 General Assembly.
- 6. The **Arrangements Panel** has appropriate matters to hand and a budget of up to £25,000 has been agreed for recommendation.
- 7. **Registration** will be in the Conference Area from Tuesday morning and exhibitions of PCI Councils and partner bodies will be located there. One Presbytery expressed concern around some arrangements for the registration process last year. Another Presbytery was concerned that there was too much disruption when the Moderator was leading the Assembly in devotions prior to the business of the day. It is hoped that some changes to arrangements for 2025 will help with issues raised.
- 8. **Publicity and Promotion** of the General Assembly was considered around a requested paper presented by the Communications Department. It was agreed that for 2025, the focus be placed on the third of the General Assembly videos and promoting it, and that the General Assembly podcast is not produced.
 Costs associated with publicity for the General Assembly by Communications were considered. Figures were similar to previous years. It was estimated that for 2025, £3,150 would be required from the Arrangements Panel budget. The Business Committee accepted these estimated costings for 2025 based on the figures presented by the Communications Department.
- 9. **Praise** will again be led by Mr Dave Whitcroft and musicians from PCI.
- 10. The **General Assembly Annual Reports in printed version** will be made available for collection at the time of Registration. It was agreed at the General Council at its meeting on 15 November, 2024 (on recommendation of the Business Committee) that a ‘PDF of the General Assembly Annual Reports book would be circulated to all ministers as in 2024, but that all hard copies are not posted but made available for collection at Registration’.

Three Presbyteries made a request in March 2025, that the decision be reconsidered. Following further debate at the General Council at its meeting on 27 March 2025, it was decided that the original decision should still stand.

11. While the new PCI Website will not be operational for this year’s General Assembly, the present streaming of arrangements for Vimeo etc will be circulated in advance.
12. Two reports from other Church Assemblies are recorded in an Appendix to this report, and others will be included in the Supplementary Reports.

ROY MACKAY, Convener

APPENDIX 1

REPORTS FROM OTHER CHURCH ASSEMBLIES

The Annual Meeting of the Society of Friends – 17–21 July 2024 The Cork College of Further Education and Training

The Very Rev Dr Roy Patton reports:

1. The Society of Friends held their Yearly Annual Meeting from 17–21 July 2024 in the city of Cork at the College of FET. Quakers (Friends) formally known as The Society of Friends meet together in silence believing that the Holy Spirit, however perceived, will lead them into worship. Quakers do not have a fixed creed but the values they hold to are expressed in what are referred to as “testimonies”. These testimonies are simplicity, truth, equality, and peace and how they relate to one another. The Quaker Testimonies are an outward expression of their inner spirituality and were very much reflected in the agenda for the annual meeting.
2. My wife Daphne and I received a very warm welcome and we were made to feel very much at home by Quakers from all over the island who expressed their appreciation of our presence among them. Visitors and representatives from other Yearly Meetings and faith groups were also welcomed and invited to share in the gathering, some doing so by Zoom. On the opening evening I was invited to reflect on the challenges and opportunities facing The Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
3. The theme for the Annual Meeting was “The Spirit of Ubuntu” – a Zulu proverb that says “I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours”. The theme anticipates the gathering of Quakers from around the world in a World Plenary to be held in South Africa in August 2024.

4. Currently, there are just over 1,500 Quakers in Ireland spread over the country both North and South. An early session was devoted to looking at the statistics, at the state of the annual meeting, reflecting on the challenges facing Quakers in varying degrees similar to the experience of our own and other denominations. However, the emphasis was on looking outward to wider community and the world at large.
5. The theme of Ubuntu emphasises that what happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group, community or country, happens to the individual. In this way people, country, environment and spirituality are intricately related. The individual can therefore only say: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'
6. The Annual Meeting reflected on the implications of Ubuntu for our communities and the world at large. The challenge is to grapple with economic inequality in our society; the struggles faced by refugees and those seeking international protection in Ireland; friends being assured that befriending activities can provide an invaluable connection to those feeling isolated. From lending a listening ear to assisting with form-filling to providing driving lessons, small actions can have a powerful impact.
7. South African Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, Director of the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva gave a public lecture: Ubuntu: A Profound Universal Value and our Hope for World Peace. As a pacifist and lifelong campaigner for human rights and justice, she highlighted a number of examples and challenged the Friends to find ways to use in their own lives and communities.
8. Quakers are guided by the Biblical counsel to "Live in love with one another as commanded by Christ, watching over one another for good, bearing with each other's failings, upholding one another prayerfully in times of difficulty and sorrow, and sharing with each other's joys." Both Daphne and I enjoyed, as well as being challenged by, the experience of sharing with those who encourage each other to work for a more just, peaceful and sustainable world.

The Presbyterian Church of Wales – 8–9 July 2024 – (via Zoom) University of Wales, Aberystwyth

The Right Rev Dr Richard Murray reports:

1. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Wales (also known as The Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales) met from Monday 8 to Tuesday 9 July 2024. The venue was the International Politics Hall of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth and, in a change to previous years, the Moderator of PCI was invited by Zoom only. As the Assembly business is mostly conducted in Welsh, simultaneous translation into English was provided as part of the Zoom transmission.

2. The Assembly was opened at 3.30pm on Monday 8 July and after opening worship there followed a lecture on behalf of the Historical Society delivered by Rev J.E. Wynne Davies entitled “The Forgotten Field”. This related to mission work in the French province of Brittany and it did seem a rather unique way to open an Assembly. Similarly, on Tuesday after opening worship there followed another lecture this time delivered by a former Moderator (Rev Marcus Robinson) under the title “Chaplaincy – essential to the life of the church”.
3. The main business of the Assembly was on either side of lunch on Tuesday and in the afternoon the Assembly concluded with the Communion and Commemoration Service. Details of ministers who had died during the previous year were given and interestingly one of the deceased was the Treasurer of the Assembly, Rev Iain Hodgins who had grown up in PCI.
4. Reflecting upon the statistics of the Welsh denomination provides some sobering reading regarding the state of the denomination. In 2005 there were 33,666 members in 753 causes. By the year 2023 those numbers had been reduced to 12,938 members in 471 causes. One of the reports stated rather starkly “We have an average of less than 25 members per building”. Currently, the denomination is spending more on buildings than on ministry and so there has been a process of selling off chapels and in the previous year 24 chapels had been sold. A week of prayer was held during the previous year for “if we are to see blessing and fruit in our often barren church landscape then prayer must be key to all that we do.”
5. On a slightly more positive note the denomination has made funding available for 14 full-time posts on the Pioneer Ministry Scheme and nine individuals have felt called to offer themselves to build on foundations that have already been laid. In terms of ministers across the denomination there are 29 in full-time pastorates, four part-time ministers and two volunteer ministers, plus nine who serve in other ways. One candidate for the ministry is open to a call.
6. One interesting debate was reported around the issue of term eldership. The Doctrine Group had recommended that elders be commissioned for a term of service rather than being “elders for life”. This term of service would be determined by each presbytery but having been sent down to presbyteries this was decisively rejected although discussion carries on.
7. In conclusion the Zoom format is far from ideal in terms of fostering fraternal relations and I hope this is reevaluated for future Assemblies. More than anything else however, one senses the greatest need is not technology but a fresh touch of the Spirit. “Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you?” (Psalm 85:6)

GENERAL ASSEMBLY STRUCTURES AND RESOURCES REVIEW PANEL

Introduction

1. The Panel has been tasked by the 2024 General Assembly with carrying out a review of denominational-level structures and resources with the aim of streamlining through restructuring. Additionally, the Panel was asked to give consideration to:
 - The future of Union Theological College Building
 - A detailed overview of the structures, remits and responsibilities of the General Assembly Councils and Commissions.
 - The wider long-term issues relating to the Council of Social Witness.
2. A Sub-Panel of the General Assembly Structures and Resources Panel is currently reviewing Ministerial Training within PCI. That Sub-Panel will be bringing a separate report to the 2025 General Assembly. However, during the incoming year its work and conclusions of that Sub-Panel will have to be considered by the full Panel, as its conclusions will obviously have a bearing on the overall structure and resources of General Assembly.
3. The General Council has remitted to the Panel an additional task of giving consideration to the relationship between ‘Mission’ and ‘Development’ regarding priorities.
4. The Panel met seven times since being established, and progressed work between meetings through the creation of three subgroups: Guiding Principles, Flexible Finance and Mission/Development. This report contains four Sections:
 - A Guiding Principles
 - B Structures of PCI: Signposts for the future
 - C Flexible Funding
 - D Ongoing Work
 - **Section A** (Guiding Principles) – is foundational to assist the Panel taking forward its work and, subject to agreement by the General Council, will be recommended to the 2025 General Assembly for adoption.
 - **Section B** (Structures of PCI: Signposts for the future) gives an indication of the Panel’s initial thinking.
 - **Section C** (Flexible Funding) – sets out significant changes which it is recommended should also be brought for approval to the 2025 General Assembly.
 - **Section D** (Other ongoing work) – gives a brief report on the other areas in the Panel’s remit.

Section A – Guiding Principles

Context

1. Assembly reports from the last 30 years which touched on aspects of strategy or restructuring were reviewed. Including Strategy for Mission (1994–1998); Ad hoc Committee on Priorities (2002–2003); Panel on Assembly Structures (2010–2013); Reconfiguration of Ministry (2023–2024).
2. Recognising each report was written and debated within unique moments of history, it is understood that aspects of ministry purpose and priorities are still relevant today and may still be applicable to PCI's present challenges. Another aspect of the various reports is the commonality of a perceived sense of crisis that evoked each piece of work.
3. Assessing what the central church should prioritise is a recognition that not all work ought to be a priority especially in days when the possibility of funding and resourcing a wide variety of good work is no longer possible. PCI needs to assess its ministries from a spectrum of what it must continue to do, believing this is fundamental to its mission; through to what it must not do, understanding something to either be wrong or at least outside the remit of the Church. Between these two extremes lie further nuances of aspects of ministry which can arguably be something the Church can do or lay aside.



4. Having re-read past papers and attempting to understand their historic context, with further reflection the following priorities have been drawn out which may help to decide what should guide PCI in drawing up principles which might guide the Church today.

All work must align with PCI's core mission and values

5. **Reaffirm the denomination's purpose:** The central structure's primary function is to support the overall mission of the PCI. This includes proclaiming the Gospel, equipping the saints, and serving the wider community. Any services provided by the central structure should clearly align with the denomination's mission to proclaim the Gospel, equip the saints, and serve the wider community.
6. **Be in keeping with the Church's confessional position and Presbyterian polity:** This includes providing guidance and resources to ensure that local congregations remain faithful to the denomination's theological convictions and polity. This will mean a commitment to determining policy and priorities together and recognising the role of Presbytery and the Kirk Session in delivering those policies.

Strengthening the role of the Presbytery

7. **Regional support and accountability:** The Presbytery is the critical governing body in Presbyterian structure, offering oversight, pastoral care, and resources to individual congregations. Reorganisation should focus on empowering Presbyteries to serve as effective centres of support and accountability. This might include streamlining decision-making processes or increasing resource-sharing across congregations.
8. **Representative governance:** The reorganisation should continue to reflect the representative nature of Presbyterian polity, where decisions are made at various levels, ensuring robust participation at all levels of governance should be a priority. Furthermore, Presbyterianism values the interconnectedness of congregations and higher governing bodies (the Presbytery and the General Assembly). The new structure should maintain strong connections between congregations and avoid isolation of individual churches.
9. **Enhancing Presbyteries' role:** Crafting the role of Presbyteries to focus more on mission development, leadership training, and pastoral care for struggling congregations could include the creation of regional mission initiatives that unite congregations around common goals.
10. To effectively fulfil these functions, it is acknowledged that Presbyteries must be of a sufficient size to do so. This may require a reduction in the number of Presbyteries, resulting in fewer but larger ones. These larger Presbyteries, in turn, must leverage the greater resources available to them within their bounds.

Provide theological and educational resources – but only those that others cannot

11. Any structural changes should ensure that high standards of theological training are maintained for ministers and ruling elders. This might include internal denominational delivery, or agreed partnerships with seminaries, online training programs, and continuing education initiatives.

Streamline administrative functions

12. **Centralise that which must be done centrally and decentralise that which can be overseen locally:** To reduce the administrative burden on local congregations, the central structure should prioritise providing shared services in areas like payroll, legal compliance, insurance, and financial management. By centralising these functions, congregations can focus more on ministry and less on operational concerns. Some functions must, by necessity, be managed centrally and provided with appropriate resources. However, others, such as Charity Trustee administration, must remain the responsibility of local oversight.
13. **Lean, mission-oriented structures:** With the emphasis on flexibility and responsiveness, central structures would likely need to become leaner. This could mean fewer layers of approval for local initiatives, encouraging quicker decision-making and a reduction in bureaucratic hurdles. Instead of a top-down model, the central office could take on more of a support and enabling role.
14. **Reshaping central Councils:** Central structures will need to focus on enabling congregational vitality rather than simply maintaining existing structures. It is obvious that any changes to the number of Presbyteries will have a radical impact on Council structure and will also impact the delivery of priorities.

Streamline governance and simplification of General Assembly structure

15. **Denominational Vision and Oversight:** The General Assembly serves as the highest governing body and is ultimately responsible for setting vision, theological direction, and denominational priorities. Reorganisation should ensure that the General Assembly remains an effective body for fostering unity and guiding the denomination's mission. Streamlining processes, reducing bureaucratic layers, and improving efficiency may help the General Assembly better serve the Church.
16. Acknowledge which decisions ought to be centralised/decentralised.

Aspire to right-sizing for sustainability

17. Central structures must reflect current needs while essential needs must be met.
18. **Budgetary restructuring:** Central finances will likely undergo significant changes. With fewer congregational contributions due to shrinking membership, the central offices, after fulfilling core financial and statutory obligations, may need to prioritise funding for mission-critical areas like church planting, evangelism, and supporting smaller congregations, rather than maintaining large administrative budgets.

19. **Potential downsizing:** The denomination may need to reduce staff and consolidate administrative functions to focus on key priorities. This could involve shifting from a large, centralised workforce to a more agile, mission-focused team that can assist Presbyteries and congregations directly. This can only happen once priorities are agreed.

ALIGN WITH KEY AREAS OF FOCUS

A. Church growth and revitalisation

20. **Revitalise struggling congregations:** The central and regional structures should provide resources and guidance for revitalising declining or struggling congregations. This might include training for church leaders in revitalisation strategies, providing coaching or mentoring for pastors, and offering financial support to help churches transition through difficult periods.
21. **Prioritise church planting in growth areas:** Church planting should be a strategic priority where there is potential for growth. The central and regional structures can help by coordinating church-planting efforts, identifying growth areas, and providing financial or human resources to launch new congregations. Cognisance should be taken of the need for collaboration with other denominations or para church agencies.
22. Embracing embryonic church plants is vital for the growth and revitalisation of the Church. These emerging communities represent opportunities to reach new demographics, engage with local contexts, and experiment with fresh approaches to ministry and mission. Nurturing these plants requires intentional investment, collaboration, and a willingness to take risks, recognising that their success can significantly contribute to the broader mission of making disciples and extending the Kingdom of God.

B. Provide a clear voice in society and model societal engagement

23. Rooted in the belief that Christ's lordship extends over all creation, Presbyterians are called to address societal issues by advocating for justice, promoting peace and reconciliation, engaging with humility and grace and encouraging informed and faithful citizenship.
24. Restructuring should ensure that a key unified voice is heard in society and is not diluted. Central structures should lead by example, engaging constructively with government bodies and other societal stakeholders, demonstrating how Kingdom values can inform policy and decision-making. The General Assembly should also act as an enabler, equipping and empowering the local church to effectively witness to the values of God's Kingdom in society.

C. Leadership development

25. **Leadership training initiatives:** The central and regional church could prioritise the development of training programs for ministers, elders and others, focusing on equipping presbyteries and local congregations for effective ministry. The central structure should play a key role in resourcing presbyteries with leadership development materials, theological education, and practical ministry tools.
26. **Support for new models of ministry:** If such ministries were to become prominent, the central structures could offer training and resources for ministers who serve part-time, are possibly non-salaried or perhaps carry out multiple roles. Central and regional structures could focus on ensuring theological education remains accessible and relevant for such leaders.

D. Youth and family ministry

27. **Engaging the next generation:** Restructuring should focus on how to effectively engage younger generations in Ireland who may feel disconnected from traditional forms of church. This could involve rethinking worship styles, youth programs, digital ministry and leadership models and roles without compromising the core doctrines of the faith. This may also be done in collaboration with parachurch organisations.
28. **Contextualised ministry:** The Church must recognise the cultural and societal changes in Ireland, adapting its approach to ministry to be more relevant to today's population. This includes addressing issues like secularisation, shifting family structures, peace-making, and new forms of social engagement, all while holding to its theological convictions.

E. Global and local mission

29. **Mission-focused structure:** The Presbyterian tradition emphasises mission, both locally and globally. Reorganisation should focus on creating structures that enhance the Church's capacity for mission. This might involve reallocating resources to mission efforts or streamlining bureaucratic processes that could impede outreach efforts.

F. Financial sustainability

30. **Sustainable financial models:** Any reorganisation should aim to create a more sustainable financial model, ensuring that resources are used wisely and missionally. This might involve evaluating how congregational contributions are assessed and allocated, as well as exploring shared resource models between congregations and Presbyteries.
31. **Addressing financial inequity:** Larger, wealthier congregations often have more resources, while smaller or struggling congregations face financial challenges. Reorganisation should seek to create more equitable systems of resource sharing, perhaps through Presbytery-wide mission initiatives, shared staff, or regional funding pools.

CONCLUSION: OVERALL GUIDING PRINCIPLES

32. From these general priorities the following Guiding Principles evolve, which the General Assembly will be requested to affirm through resolution:
- (a) **The General Assembly affirm that:** the primary function of its central structures is to support the overall mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. As a result, services provided by those central structures should align with the denomination's mission.
 - (b) **The General Assembly therefore further affirm that:**
 - (i) The local congregation, led by presbyters, is the primary unit of mission and ministry, operating under the oversight of the courts of the Church.
 - (ii) Decisions regarding local mission and ministry should be made at congregational level whenever possible, with oversight provided by Presbyteries and the General Assembly.
 - (iii) The role of the General Assembly is to provide oversight and to envision, resource and support local congregations and Presbyteries in fulfilling their mission and ministry. This will include encouraging participation in wider mission and ministry, normally beyond the scope of any one congregation or Presbytery, with the General Assembly setting the vision and providing oversight of the delivery of this.
 - (iv) The General Assembly must prioritise such work that only the Church in mission and ministry is best placed to do.
 - (v) The General Assembly must model Kingdom values in its mission and ministry, pursuing its vocation to influence both society and government in line with those values, especially as an advocate for the vulnerable and the marginalised.
 - (vi) The General Assembly must be courageous and always follow the evident prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Section B**Structures of PCI: Signposts for the future**

1. To enable continued reflection on restructuring the current work of PCI, it is necessary to consider how that work is framed in the Code (and in practice!) The Panel therefore considered the following:
 - (a) Full extracts from the Code outlining the detail of current Council structure and workings.
 - (b) Prefaces to the work of the Councils as printed in annual General Assembly Accounts which give an insight into day-to-day activity and a sense of current priorities.

2. A summary of the current standing structures under the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is included in Appendix 1 of this section of the report.
3. Discussion to date has raised the following points:
 - (a) The parallel work on finance touching on the potential of releasing cash/reserves has indicated the requirement, from a Charity Commission perspective, of having a competent body for strategic oversight. Our current Council model may not be the most efficient and may need improvement. However, simply looking at the current structures as defined in the Code and tweaking a model to improve governance requirements has an air of “rearranging deckchairs” that will not yield the positive results desired.
 - (b) The perceived understanding held in the wider Church (especially in light of the current congregational reconfiguration work) is that there is an expectation of forthcoming changes which will be evidenced in a reduction in size of the central church. There will need to be some areas of pruning to satisfy the legitimate demands of the Church. In any oversight body there are always efficiencies that can be made and that must be assessed as the central departments fulfil their function.
 - (c) A desire has also been expressed for a thinner central church with more power and responsibility taken on by local Presbyteries and congregations on the frontline of mission. This does need to be balanced however, by ensuring there are adequate and effective mechanisms in place providing oversight to deliver a coherent and unified vision for ministry. Savings in efficiency must not merely be understood in financial terms but also from the perspective of the ministerial resources that are required to service the structures of PCI through its Councils, Presbyteries, and General Assembly.
 - (d) The primary unit of mission within the Kingdom of God is through the local congregation and the wider denomination exists within that context. While the denomination must therefore focus on resourcing, supporting and encouraging the local mission and ministry of congregations, it also has a key and vital role in creatively fostering that sense of wider connectedness and identity, both for congregations and their members, that is part of the essence of what it is to be Church.
4. Immediately we need to agree two foci through which we view the responsibility, purpose, vision and working of the central church.
 - (a) **Resourcing congregations locally.**

While there is great difference in capacity of each individual congregation in PCI, the central church has a role of resourcing each congregation to shine their light before men and thereby bring praise to God (Matt 5:16). Some congregations will need more help than others but there is a need to give each church vision, impetus, training, practical help and possibly finance.

- (b) **Resourcing wider gospel work by ministering in society by enabling what only the Church can do.**

There are also aspects of ministry that will be beyond the scope and capacity of any one congregation that the Panel believes are still essential for the denomination to be involved in (and for each congregation to feel involved in / partnered with).

5. **For consideration:**

- (a) Increasing Presbytery responsibility will require additional resourcing locally in terms of finance and personnel. (The former may be easier to acquire than the latter?) While more decisions may be taken locally there is still a requirement to oversee procedures and ensure consistent governance.
- (b) The decision on what aspects of church work could potentially be divested from the centre to a local agency will need to be actioned as part of this process. This could be viewed as a congregation or Presbytery taking on some responsibility that is currently administered centrally or equally receiving benefit (or paying for the services received) from a parachurch ministry for some function that is currently provided centrally. An extreme position on this may be that the Church centrally merely fulfils statutory functions (HR, child and adult safety, finance, IT, Judicial) with the impact that missional creativity and drive is lost from the centre. A pertinent question to consider is, if it is judged whether there is confidence that congregations and/or Presbyteries can drive the needed creativity and provide vision sufficient to replace what may be lost by divesting too much from the centre?

6. **The next actions will be to:**

- (a) Apply the agreed principles to the working and structures of PCI.
This will have the effect of being a filtering agent to garner what are the essential areas of work that the central church will be involved in. The result will permit vital priorities to be clearly established, and a commitment made to resourcing these aspects of ministry and mission. It should equally be stressed that priorities that have been judged to be lacking or under-resourced can be properly highlighted.
- (b) Reflect on the concept of representation.
This has always been part of the Presbyterian psyche. However, changing governance models, for example, by creating an executive oversight body may require a much lesser and leaner structure. Bringing harmony and trust into that debate will be no small task. One way of furthering that may be the idea of moving to fewer Presbyteries and opening the debate again on whether the wider Church is ready to contemplate that.

Section B – Appendix 1

Summary of current standing structures under the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

General Council

The General Council serves as the central coordinating body, handling administrative and strategic oversight. It:

- Manages urgent Church-wide matters and coordinates activities of other councils.
- Oversees financial systems, staff policies, and building maintenance.
- Administers the United Appeal for mission funding.
- Communications
- Acts as the charity trustee for the General Assembly, ensuring legal and financial compliance.

Judicial Commission

The Judicial Commission has General Assembly powers to dispose finally of any cases of appeal or reference or any other matter which may be referred to it by virtue of the Code. Where the Judicial Commission deems it appropriate, it may refer cases to a Special Commission to hear and issue.

Linkage Commission

The Linkage Commission manages structural changes in congregations, addressing vacant pastorates and optimising ministry resources. Its key responsibilities include:

- Facilitating linkages, dissolutions, and amalgamations of congregations.
- Approving ministry terms and managing grants.
- Ensuring compliance with ministry guidelines and reallocating resources effectively.

Council for Public Affairs

This council represents the Church's views on public issues, fostering relationships with governments and civic bodies. It:

- Addresses education, social, and ethical concerns.
- Ensures the Church's voice is heard in public discourse through media collaboration.
- Nominates representatives to education and state bodies.

Council for Training in Ministry

Focused on leadership development, this council:

- Oversees the selection, training, and pastoral care of ministers, deaconesses, and preachers.
- Manages Union Theological College and related resources.
- Provides conflict resolution services.

Council for Congregational Life and Witness

Supporting congregational vitality, it:

- Offers resources for worship, discipleship, pastoral care, evangelism, and leadership.
- Develops youth, family, and women's ministries.
- Provides practical training in areas such as finance, and disability awareness.
- Migrants Ministry

Council for Mission in Ireland

This council advances mission initiatives within Ireland, focusing on:

- Church development, planting, and chaplaincy services.
- Managing the Home and Irish Mission and other funds.
- Supporting personnel in recognised ministry roles.

Council for Global Mission

Overseeing international outreach, this council:

- Builds global church partnerships and sends mission personnel.
- Addresses global issues such as development and environmental concerns.
- Manages the annual World Development Appeal.

Council for Social Witness

Delivering social services, this council:

- Provides care for older people and individuals with disabilities.
- Manages services related to criminal justice and substance abuse.
- Supports specialised ministries and oversees safeguarding policies.

Section C – Flexible Funding

(The following is a summary of a longer working document.
Further proposals regarding flexible funding will need to be considered once other key principles regarding priorities and structures are agreed.)

Introduction

1. In carrying out the remit assigned to it by the General Assembly 2024, the Structures and Resources Review Panel (SRRP) established a Flexible Funding Sub-Group. The remit of the Sub-Group is:
“to draft a paper on ‘Funding Flexibility’ (including how systems could be simplified and reserves ‘freed-up’) for discussion at the next meeting of the SRRP.”
2. The discussions of the Sub-Group have centred around two key areas:
 - (a) Accounting and reporting requirements (Phase 1 – considered below).
 - (b) Strategic Financial Management (Phase 2 – to be considered in a future paper).

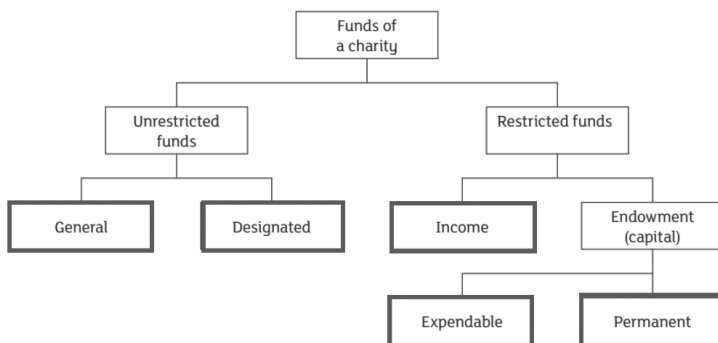
Phase 1 – Accounting and Reporting Requirements

Background

3. As charities receive funding from the public, they are required to be accountable for that funding and transparent about the way it is spent. To aid this transparency and to facilitate financial comparison between charities, regulators have developed a Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) for charity accounts.

Income / Asset Classification

4. In line with the SORP, charitable income must be classified into a particular type of fund. Income received by charities is classified into one of the types of funds shown (in red) below depending on the circumstances.



Each of the above classifications is explained briefly in Appendix 1.

5. For historical reasons, PCI's accounting policy for many years has been to classify income, investments and other assets at a Council level. Using this approach, 98% of income was classified as Restricted in the 2023 accounts.
6. However, in terms of its official legal structure, PCI is not a collection of disparate Councils, but a single legal entity. As the final audited, published accounts are at an organisational level, it is therefore more appropriate to classify and report income and assets at the overall organisational level rather than at Council level.
7. When considering this revised income classification approach, the Sub-Group identified that a substantial amount of Restricted Income should more accurately be classified as General. This change will improve the accuracy of our financial reporting and make it easier for General Assembly to allocate funds to agreed future priorities.
8. Initial discussions have been held with the newly appointed auditors to obtain their technical advice in relation to the proposed change in classification approach. They agreed that this revised approach is more appropriate and better reflects the requirements of the SORP.
9. **The Flexible Funding Sub-Group therefore recommends:**
 - (a) that classification decisions for income, investments and other assets be determined at the overall organisational level rather than at Council level.
 - (b) that the Finance Panel of the Support Services Committee, in consultation with the auditors, revise the accounting policies to reflect this alternative approach
10. **To minimise the potential impact on existing financial plans or budgets, the Sub-Group further recommends:**
 - (a) that any assets which will be re-classified by the revised approach are treated initially as Designated funds in line with their existing restriction rather than General funds.
11. Organisational Impact – the potential impact of these proposals on the income classifications from the 2023 accounts is set out below for illustration purposes.

	Current Classifications			Revised Classifications		
	Unrestricted	Restricted	Endowment	Unrestricted	Restricted	Endowment
Voluntary income	100	11,405,073	94,588	6,180,700	5,224,473	94,588
Generated funds	429,828	218,969	496	429,828	218,969	496
Investment income	16,027	1,185,471	337,587	727,310	474,188	337,587
Charitable activities	0	14,061,677	0	13,800,919	260,758	0
Other	0	487,699	0	476,621	11,078	0
Total	445,955	27,358,889	432,671	21,615,378	6,189,466	432,671

Section C

Appendix 1 – Funds of a charity

Unrestricted Funds

General	<p>General Funds are funds which can be used for any of the Charity's purposes - there are no restrictions on what Trustees can do with this money.</p> <p>Things like the loose collection in a church service or the freewill offering would be Unrestricted General Funds.</p> <p>Income a charity generates from services it provides is also classified as General Funds. An example of this would be the income from residents in care homes.</p>
Designated	<p>Designated Funds are General Funds which the Trustees have decided to ' earmark ' for a particular project, task or purpose. There are still no formal legal restrictions on this funding as the Trustees can decide to 'un-designate' the funds if they want.</p> <p>An example of Designated funding might be money set aside by Trustees from the freewill offering to pay for first aid training in the congregation. If no-one then volunteers to be trained, the Trustees can cancel the Designation and release the funds back to General Funds.</p>

Restricted Funds

Income	<p>Restricted Income is money which has been given to the Trustees for a particular purpose. These funds can only be used for that purpose.</p> <p>Congregational contributions to United Appeal Income are Restricted income as they can only be used for Mission purposes. Trustees cannot, for example, use United Appeal funds to repair Assembly Buildings.</p> <p>Importantly, Charity rules require that Restricted Income funds must be spent “within a reasonable period from their receipt” (SORP par 2.11).</p>
Permanent Endowment	<p>Permanent Endowment Funds represent money which is donated but as part of the terms of the donation must be invested and retained – the Trustees can only use the income from this fund. The donor can also specify if the annual income is General or Restricted.</p> <p>This type of funding commonly arises from a bequest. A donor could leave money which must be invested but could say that the funds should be used either for a specific purpose (like Global Mission) or added to General Funds.</p> <p>Importantly, Restricted Income which the Trustees have decided to invest does not become an Endowment Fund.</p>
Expendable Endowment	<p>Expendable Endowment funding is perhaps the most confusing fund. It is money which has been donated but, unlike Restricted Income, there is no requirement to spend the capital.</p> <p>With this type of funding however, unlike Permanent Endowment, the Trustees can decide to spend the capital.</p>

Section D – Other Ongoing Work

1. A Sub-Group of the Panel is currently examining the issue of the Union Theological College Building. The sub-group has examined a range of options and that work is ongoing. In the light of initial work, a 'restructure and refurbish' option has been identified as optimal, though further detailed consideration is necessary before conclusions can be presented to the General Assembly for decision. The General Council approved the allocation of funding from the General Assembly Discretionary Fund to enable more detailed technical reports and proposals to be drawn up. At the time of writing, it is hoped to bring an additional report to the General Assembly regarding funding options in relation to any proposed restructure and refurbishment of the UTC buildings. It is anticipated that this will be included as part of the Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet and presented in the Private Session on the Thursday morning of the Assembly.
2. As previously reported to the General Council, the officers of the Support Services Committee have been consulting with the officers of the Council for Social Witness regarding funding deficits within the services provided by CSW. These have resulted in the temporary provision of a 'central church overdraft facility' being necessary. The Support Services Committee reported on this matter to the April meeting of the General Council. It is envisaged that the General Assembly Structures and Resources Panel's consideration of wider long-term issues relating to the Council of Social Witness will now commence and again, it is anticipated that a report will be included as part of the Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet and presented in the Private Session on the Thursday morning of the Assembly.
3. The additional General Council remit, of giving consideration of the relationship between 'Mission' and 'Development' regarding priorities, is being considered initially by a dedicated sub-group made up of some members of the Panel and some officers of the Council for Global Mission. Deliberations are at an early stage.

DAVID IRVINE, Convener

WILLIAM HENRY, Chair

MINISTERIAL TRAINING REVIEW SUB-PANEL

1. Arising out of the work of the Reconfiguration of Ministry Task Group, the 2024 General Assembly approved the recommendation that the "General Council establish a review of the training of ministers of Word and Sacrament." The last review of the requirements of training took place in 2009.

2. In seeking to fulfil its brief the Sub-Panel has held five plenary meetings and, in addition, it has established two working groups; (a) to examine the “Core of Ministerial Training” and (b) to consider different models for the selection of ministerial training, the initial formal ministerial training and the ongoing ministerial training.

A. Guiding principles

- (a) We want our future ministers to help their congregations to engage in God-honouring worship, to be able to preach and communicate the Gospel effectively, to be loving and caring shepherds of the flock, whilst displaying the fruit of the Spirit with the heart and skills of a servant leader who, along with the other elders, encourages everyone to live and witness to Christ in culturally appropriate ways.
- (b) The end-product of training should help our future ministers eagerly embrace lifelong learning, including the ability to think critically, alongside growth in spiritual formation and growth in grace through the regular practice of healthy spiritual habits.

B. Selection

- (a) Kirk Session should take a greater role in initial selection, examination and support.
- (b) Presbyteries should play a key role in looking for future ministerial candidates and should be more proactive in this.
- (c) The Sub-Panel believes that the selection process at council/denominational level is robust and consistent and needs only to be examined from time to time by the relevant council.
- (d) The selection process helps test the sense of call of the prospective trainee and the following areas should be tested/examined: character, convictions, competence, collegiality and willingness to embrace the cost of ministry.

C. Initial Training

- (a) The current pathway for training has normally comprised three years of full-time theological study (during the third year, students serve in a part-time assistantship); this period is followed by two years’ full time service as assistant minister before eligibility for a Call. Further post-licentiate and post-ordination training is required.
- (b) The Sub-Panel has been exploring different models of training, wherein theological training (delivered in a variety of ways) will be accompanied by an assistantship in a congregation. As yet, no conclusion has been reached as to the appropriate length or possible combination of classroom and practical training.

- (c) The Sub-Panel has given consideration to the supervising minister of the trainee having a much more significant role as trainer than at present. The trainee should face the broadest possible experiences of ministry; and competencies will be assessed.
- (d) The Sub-Panel has explored how a mentor could be appointed to support the trainee during these four years (normally an experienced minister).
- (e) If points (c) and (d) were to be confirmed, then training will need to be given to both supervising ministers and mentors.
- (f) If points (c) and (d) were to be confirmed, then congregations receiving trainees as assistants, will need to understand that they are primarily helping the trainee develop skills and spiritual character – in other words, to think of them more as a trainee in learning rather than a member of staff.
- (g) The Sub-Panel is aware that there could be financial implications to its final conclusions, but, as yet, no decision has been reached in respect of this.

D. Support

- (a) As well as the home minister, Kirk Session and congregation, ongoing support for the trainee minister should come from a number of sources including, Presbytery, College Community, Supervising minister and an independent mentor.
- (b) After the years of initial training, the trainee will be available for a Call and can proceed to ordination.

E. Ongoing Training:

Following ordination there will be an ongoing emphasis on training. This may be organised by Presbyteries, Councils and College. This training will be mandatory and monitored by Presbytery. This training would focus on areas not covered in the initial training period; or which are better addressed once the minister has been in their first charge for a period of time.

ROB CRAIG, Convener

GRAHAM CONNOR, Chair

MEMORIAL RECORD

Memorial Record Rev Derek Drysdale

The Rev Robert Derek Drysdale, BA, BD, Minister Emeritus (Released), Belmont, died on 1 July 2024, in the eighty-sixth year of his age and the sixty-first year of his ministry. He was born in Belfast on 6 March 1939 as the son of Robert and Rebecca, and grew up in McMaster Street on the Newtownards Road close to the shipyard. The family were members of Westbourne. He attended Mountpottinger Elementary School, followed by Belfast Technical High School. Encouraged by the headmaster and his mother, he realised that higher education was an aspiration that could become a reality and so he attended an independent tutorial college in south Belfast where he achieved the necessary qualifications for university. It was through The Boys' Brigade and Christian Endeavour that he made a faith commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord, which in turn led to him feeling a call to ordained ministry. Studying at Magee University College, he graduated with a BA from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1960; this was followed by a BD from Edinburgh University in 1963. While there he had a summer placement on Prince Edward Island in Canada and became convinced that his ministry would be in a parish setting, rather than an academic one as he had originally thought. In 1963 he was licensed by the Presbytery of East Belfast on 9 June, then ordained as Assistant Minister in Hamilton Road, Bangor, by the Presbytery of Ards on 29 December, later moving to First Lisburn where he was installed as an assistant by the Presbytery of Dromore on 2 January 1965. Mr Drysdale was installed as Minister in Dundrod on 27 June 1968 by the Presbytery of Templepatrick, after almost eight years returning to his home Presbytery of East Belfast which installed him as Minister in McQuiston Memorial on 4 April 1976. The greater, and most fulfilling, part of his ministry was spent in Belmont where the same Presbytery installed him on 10 January 1980. He served as Moderator of the Synod of Belfast in 2001. After a ministry of twenty-four years in Belmont he retired on 6 March 2004, becoming Minister Emeritus (Released) on 6 February 2024. Outside parish ministry he was deeply involved in broadcasting, ecumenism, New Testament studies and... golf! For some years he chaired the Inter-Church Relations Board, and he represented the Church for nine years on the British Council of Churches. He married Hilary in 1975, 'the wind beneath his wings'. On his retirement they joined Groomspoint, playing a significant role in the congregation. He was faithful to her 'in sickness and in health' until the end of his own life. To Hilary, to their children Shaun, Jayne, Alan and Jill, and the wider family, we express our sympathy and gain encouragement from Derek's own testimony: "My anchors remained in my personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and the faith that treasured the riches handed down by previous generations and traditions. These anchors helped hold me fast when I could easily have drifted on seas of uncertainty, and the moral changes taking place in an increasingly secular society."

Memorial Record Rev Cecil McCullough

The Rev John Cecil McCullough, BA, BD, PhD, Professor Emeritus (Released), died on 24 November 2024, in the eighty-third year of his age and the fifty-eighth year of his ministry. He was born on 13 February 1942 into a farming family as the son of John and Mabel. The family were members of Grange. He attended Ballymena Academy, Queen's University, Belfast, and the Presbyterian College. His degrees were all awarded by Queen's: BA 1963 in Modern Languages; BD 1966; and PhD 1971. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Ballymena in his home congregation on 1 June 1966. This was followed by an assistantship in Trinity, Bangor, where he was ordained by the Presbytery of Ards on 8 January 1967. He was installed by the Presbytery of Templepatrick as Minister in Muckamore on 2 January 1969. This was followed by periods of service overseas, along with his wife Dorothy Magill, whom he had first met as they waited together for the school bus. He served as a Missionary to Lebanon from 12 October 1975, arriving at a time of great tension and violence, enduring what he described at the time as 'the worst night of fighting in Lebanese history'. Nonetheless, he stayed to teach in the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, becoming Academic Dean before leaving nine years later. He became Professor of New Testament at Dunedin in the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand from 2 January 1984. He returned to Ireland and was installed by the Presbytery of South Belfast as Professor of New Testament at Union Theological College, serving from 1 September 1988 until his retirement on 31 August 2007. He also served as College Principal from 1998 to 2002. He became Professor Emeritus (Released) on 7 January 2023. While at Union, Professor McCullough edited 'Irish Biblical Studies' and was a founder member of the British New Testament Society. In addition, he was Convener of the University Education Committee from 1989 to 94, the Europe and Middle East Committee from 1993 to 2000, and the Doctrine Committee while he was Principal. He was actively involved in the Leuenberg Fellowship and served on a World Council of Churches committee for the Middle East. He and Dorothy lived in Broughshane following his retirement and joined First Broughshane congregation. We commend our brother to the safe keeping of God, remembering his careful scholarship, gracious teaching manner and open-hearted Christian love, and praying that Dorothy, Judith with Chris, and Stuart with Janine, will experience the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ giving them strength.

Memorial Record Rev Jim Mattison

The Rev Robert James (Jim) Mattison, BD, Minister Emeritus (Released), Cremore, Fourtowns and Poyntzpass, died on 8 December 2024, in the seventy-seventh year of his age and the forty-seventh year of his ministry. He was born at Hillsborough, Co Down, on 27 September 1948 as the son of James, a water foreman, and Kathleen. He was the youngest of three children, his older sisters being Agnes and May. The family were members of Hillsborough congregation. He attended Hillsborough Primary School, followed by Wallace High School, Lisburn Technical College, The College of Business Studies, Queen's University, Belfast, and

The Presbyterian College. He obtained his BD from Queen's. Prior to entering university in 1971, he was employed for five years as a Higher Clerical Officer in the Personnel Department of the Electricity Board for Northern Ireland. Mr Mattison served as a student assistant in Strand, Belfast, was licensed at Hillsborough by the Presbytery of Dromore on 1 June 1977, and then ordained as Assistant to the Convener in Pomeroy by the Presbytery of Tyrone on 1 December 1978. He was installed by the Presbytery of Dromore in Second Dromara on 29 January 1981 where he served for ten years, becoming Chaplain to Maze and Maghaberry prisons on 4 April 1991. A return to congregational ministry saw him installed by the Presbytery of Newry to the joint charge of Cremore, Fourtowns and Poyntzpass on 22 September 2000, where he served for eight years until his retirement on 30 September 2008. He became Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2017. For Mr Mattison, the Church was most definitely its people, and he took great care to ensure that the pastoral aspect of his Ministry was just as important as the sermon delivered on a Sunday morning. This meant that he knew his congregation, their joys, trials and tribulations, and what made them tick. Equally, events that brought members of the congregation together enabled relationships to be developed that led to the church being a supportive family. His interests outside the church included Ulster-Scots cookery; singing, especially sacred music; and the Loyal Orange Institution. In the same year that he started ministerial training, 1975, he married Mary Smyth whom he had known since childhood. They went on to have four children: Ruth (with Rodney), Jonathan, Andrew (with Emma) and Kathryn (with Nigel), followed by four grandchildren, Rachel, Faith, Leah and Luke. Mary predeceased him in 2022. We commend the entire family circle to the grace of Almighty God, remembering the truth of Philippians 1:23: "with Christ, which is far better".

Memorial Record Rev Trevor Wilson

The Rev Trevor Hamilton Wilson, ACII, BD, Minister Emeritus (Released), Templepatrick, died on 3 February 2025, in the eighty-sixth year of his age and the forty-sixth year of his ministry. He was born in Belfast on 3 May 1939 as the second son of Joseph and Sarah, his brothers being Ronald (Ronnie) and Colin (deceased). He was educated at Strandtown Primary School, then Annadale Grammar School. A strong interest in sport meant he played football for Annadale, scoring three goals in a Schools' Cup Final, and was signed by Cliftonville FC. He worked for fourteen years in the insurance sector, obtaining Associateship of the Chartered Insurance Institute, before answering a call to ordained ministry. He married Elizabeth Croke in Bloomfield on 27 July 1968 – she fully supported his call to ministry and he recognised her role as breadwinner while he studied at The Presbyterian College, Belfast, obtaining his BD from Queen's University, Belfast in 1979. He had been nurtured in faith in Bloomfield, and it is there that he was licensed by the Presbytery of East Belfast on 4 June that year, which Presbytery ordained him as Assistant Minister in Megain Memorial on 4 January 1980. He was installed by the Presbytery of Templepatrick

on 31 March 1981 to the charge of Templepatrick, where he served as preacher, pastor and friend to his people, until his retirement on 31 August 2004. His children's addresses were a weekly favourite, especially his use of puppets and visual aids created by Elizabeth. He became Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2023. The Boys' Brigade had a profound influence on Mr Wilson's life, starting at the age of seven with his home 24th Belfast Company at Bloomfield. While Captain, he made a significant contribution to 'The Golden Jubilee Souvenir Brochure of the 24th Belfast Company of The Boys' Brigade, 1927-1977'. He went on to be appointed Vice-President of the Northern Ireland District in 1988, then National Vice-President in 1996. On his retirement they moved back to east Belfast and joined the congregation of Gilnahirk. We commend Elizabeth, daughter Nicola, brother Ronald and the wider family to the grace of Almighty God, remembering the words of Hebrews 6.19 so associated with The Boys' Brigade: "...which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast."

JIM STOTHERS, Convener

GENERAL COUNCIL SECTION 2

UNITED APPEAL COMMITTEE

The United Appeal Committee has met on three occasions since the 2024 General Assembly:

- 13 Feb 2025 to consider the response to the 2024 Appeal
- 4 Apr 2025 to prepare for interviews with Councils regarding their grant requests for 2026
- 8 Apr 2025 to review Council budget submissions for 2026 and to agree recommendations to the General Council for an Appeal and grants to Councils for that year.

Appendix 1 includes a summary of the Income and Expenditure Account for United Appeal showing results for 2024 and projections / budgets for 2025 and 2026.

1. The 2024 Appeal

At the meeting on 13 Feb 2025 the Committee considered the response to the 2024 Appeal and the financial outturn for that year. The accounts for 2024 show that £3.138m was received against the 2024 Appeal target of £3.4m. However, an additional £370K was received for prior year targets and £92K from legacies, trust funds and investments, bringing the total UA income for 2024 to £3.601m. The Target of Honour for the 2024 United Appeal has therefore been exceeded in terms of total income.

The Committee was very encouraged by this response to the Appeal, particularly in a time of financial pressure for many congregations and individual members.

At 31 Jan 2025 when the accounts were closed,

- 42 congregations had not contributed to United Appeal (2023 – 62, 2022 – 27)
- 149 congregations contributed above their target (2023 – 169, 2022 – 148)
- 151 congregations did not achieve their target (2023 – 131, 2022 – 111)
- 176 congregations contributed to their target exactly (2023 – 164, 2022 – 168).

However, it should be noted that late contributions have been received from many of these congregations, bringing in over £200k additional income, and at the time of writing only 15 congregations have made no contribution to the 2024 United Appeal. This is also a very encouraging outcome and the Committee would like to thank members and congregations for their engagement with United Appeal in this way.

The Committee therefore agreed to pay the 2024 United Appeal grants in full, specifically

Council	Grant
Mission in Ireland	1,065,000
Global Mission	900,000
Congregational Life & Witness	640,000
Training in Ministry	375,000
Social Witness	245,000
General – Creative Production	200,000
TOTAL	<u><u>3,425,000</u></u>

After these payments were made, the United Appeal generated a net surplus of £131K for 2024, leaving reserves of £2.331m at the end of 2024.

The Committee also agreed that, to assist Councils with their financial management, from 2025 onwards the full grant will be paid to Councils 'in-year' and any adjustments required to funding levels arising from a shortfall in Appeal receipts will be managed by the Committee in future years.

2. The 2025 Appeal

In response to the challenging receipts for 2023, the June 2024 General Assembly agreed that the Appeal target for 2025 should be reduced to £3.3m and the following grants were approved for 2025.

Council	Grant
Mission in Ireland	990,000
Global Mission	810,000
Cong. Life and Witness	688,000
Training in Ministry	342,000
Social Witness	560,963
	<u><u>3,390,963</u></u>

Based on an Appeal target of £3.3m this level of grant funding is considered sustainable.

3. The 2026 Appeal

At its meeting on 13 February 2025 the Committee agreed a range of assumptions that Councils should use in preparing their budgets for 2025 and a ‘Commissioning Note’ for Councils was issued subsequently.

The Councils prepared and submitted their budgets during Feb / Mar 2025 and the Committee met to review the submissions on 4 April 2025. These submissions included revised projections for 2025 and budgets for 2026. The submissions were accompanied by a letter explaining the rationale for the amount requested and any key assumptions made. The Committee would like to express appreciation to Council Secretaries, Conveners and Finance Managers for their hard work in preparing these submissions.

The Committee then met on 8 April 2025 with representatives from each of the Councils to discuss the bids and seek any necessary clarification. The following are the key points identified from the requests.

Mission in Ireland

	2026 Request	2025 Approved	2024 Actual	2023 Actual	2022 Actual
UA Grants	1,100,000	990,000	1,080,000	1,065,000	1,065,000

- (a) The Council is aware that the developing ‘Reconfiguration of Ministry’ proposals have the potential to provide funds for capital projects. UA funding is not used for capital projects.
- (b) Church planting projects are ongoing in Wexford, Donegal, West Belfast and Balbriggan.
- (c) A number of ‘Mission Pioneers’ have been appointed and others are in training.
- (d) The Council is developing ambitious plans to plant 10 churches in 10 years.
- (e) The uptake of Irish Mission Fund grants has been very positive.

Global Mission

	2026 Request	2025 Approved	2024 Actual	2023 Actual	2022 Actual
UA Grants	830,000	810,000	900,000	900,000	1,000,000

- (a) UA is the Council’s primary source of income although the Council has anticipated a grant from Presbyterian Women of £70k in both 2024 and 2025.
- (b) It is anticipated that 19 Global Mission workers will be supported in 2025 and 2026.

- (c) There is an increased emphasis on partnering with global churches to support local leaders who know the language and culture.
- (d) The Wembley property is rented out, but sale of the property is actively being considered.

Congregational Life and Witness

	2026 Request	2025 Approved	2024 Actual	2023 Actual	2022 Actual
UA Grants	660,000	660,000	660,000	640,000	640,000
Pres Herald	29,400	28,000	25,000		

- (a) The request for 2026 is again split into two elements, anticipating an ongoing requirement to fund the move of the Presbyterian Herald in 2024.
- (b) Unlike other Councils this Council does not have significant other sources of income and is heavily reliant on their UA Grant.
- (c) Approximately 90% of the Council's UA grant request is used for staff related costs.
- (d) Almost 50% of congregations actively engaged with CCLW events or activities during 2024.

Training in Ministry

	2026 Request	2025 Approved	2024 Actual	2023 Actual	2022 Actual
UA Grants	475,000	342,000	380,000	375,000	375,000

- (a) Expenditure higher than expected due to unanticipated expenditure on necessary administration.
- (b) Student numbers continue to be lower than expected. Future projections have now been revised.
- (c) Interest in the undergraduate programme has been strong. 'Ministry' applications have also been positive but the funding impact of new ministry students will not arise until Sept 2026.
- (d) The Council is seeking to engage a new member of staff specifically to attract additional international PhD students.
- (e) The College is facing significant financial pressure both in operating and capital costs.

Social Witness

	2026 Request	2025 Request	2024 Approved	2023 Actual	2022 Actual
UA Grants	675,000	590,963	400,000	245,000	245,500

- (a) CSW continued to face exceptionally difficult financial pressures in 2024 but the position has improved materially since 2023.
- (b) CSW UA funding relates primarily to Safeguarding costs and the increased bid for 2026 is driven by substantial increases in Safeguarding requirements across the denomination.
- (c) The CSW UA bid also includes elements of the Council's Assembly Buildings staff who are not recharged to the care homes and the PCI Carecall contract.

Summary

The Committee was very encouraged by the discussions with the Council representatives and is grateful for the work they put in to delivering the remit they have been assigned by General Assembly.

Having reflected on the outcomes of the 2024 Appeal, in-year projections for 2025 and requests from the Councils for 2026, the Committee has decided to recommend a United Appeal target for 2026 of £3.4m. This is a slight increase on the 2025 target of £3.3m.

As is normal in this process, the total of the requests from Councils exceeds the recommended level of the Appeal. The Committee was, however, conscious of the very positive response to the 2024 Appeal and of having recommended reduced grants in recent years. The Committee was also keen to encourage Councils in their work across our denomination, the island of Ireland and beyond.

In making the proposals below, the Committee therefore commends the work being done through the Councils and seeks to encourage them in increasingly difficult circumstances.

A summary of the requests received is set out below alongside the Committee's recommended grants for 2026.

	Council 2026 Requests £000	Proposed Adjustments	Proposed 2026 Grants £000	Approved Grants 2025 £000
Mission in Ireland	1,100	0	1,100	990
Global Mission	830	0	830	810
Congregational Life and Witness	689	0	689	688
Training in Ministry	475	0	475	342
Social Witness	675	0	675	560
TOTAL	3,769	0	3,769	3,391

MARTIN HAMPTON, Convener
KEN SWARBRICK, Financial Secretary

APPENDIX 1

UNITED APPEAL 2026	Requests	Proposed	Proposed	Revised	Budget	Actual
	Received	Adjustment	Grant	Forecast	(to GA)	
	2026	2026	2026	2025	2025	2024
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
THE APPEAL						
Appeal Target	3,400		3,400	3,300	3,300	3,400
INCOME & EXPENDITURE						
INCOME						
Congregations (current year)	3,250		3,250	3,200	3,100	3,156
Congregations (prior years)	200		200	200	100	353
Income from Trust Funds	28		28	28	28	28
Investment Income	1		1	1	1	1
Donations and Bequests	10		10	10	10	11
Bank Interest	20		20	20	20	52
TOTAL INCOME	3,509		3,509	3,459	3,259	3,601
EXPENDITURE						
Promotional Costs	10		10	5	10	7
Reorganisation cost						
	10		10	5	10	7
GRANTS						
Mission in Ireland	1,100		1,100	990	990	1,080
Global Mission	830		830	810	810	900
Training in Ministry	475		475	342	342	380
Congregational Life and Witness	689		689	688	688	685
Social Witness	675		675	561	561	400
Other (Earmarked)	15		15	15	15	18
TOTAL GRANTS	3,784	0	3,784	3,406	3,406	3,463
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	3,794	0	3,794	3,411	3,416	3,470
SURPLUS (DEFICIT)	-285	0	-285	48	-157	131
Grants Returned - CCLW			0			
Gain on Investments						2
Added /(Deducted) to/(from) reserves	-285	0	-285	48	-157	133
RESERVES AT START OF YEAR	2,379		2,379	2,331	2,001	2,198
RESERVES AT END OF YEAR	2,094	0	2,094	2,379	1,844	2,331

SUPPORT SERVICES COMMITTEE

Introduction

The Support Services Committee (SSC) met twice for its stated meetings and had a specially convened meeting to consider the issue of salaries.

A. ASSEMBLY BUILDINGS DEPARTMENTS

Human Resources

1. There continues to be high level of recruitment across all departments, but especially in the Council for Social Witness (CSW). There were 137 new starts and 124 leavers in the year to 1 March 2025. Dealing with employee relations i.e., disciplinary action, grievances etc. also takes up a considerable amount of time for the HR Department and several cases provided considerable challenges as they were taken forward. An external investigator has been used which has been an advantage in terms of the quality of reports and turnaround time. Salary levels continue to be a problem with recruiting, with a struggle to attract experienced staff across a range of areas. This is being examined by a sub group of SSC and the full SSC had a special meeting to consider salaries and pay bands. Work is ongoing and will require decisions to be taken. Rather than wait until the General Assembly each year, the SSC is proposing that the General Council approves any changes.

Property

2. The revision to the rules of the Retired Ministers' House Fund, which had previously been agreed, were reviewed by the General Assembly Solicitor and finalised. The SSC noted the RMHF accounts for 2024, which showed a surplus of £20,314. The SSC agreed that the rents be increased by 2.7%, in line with NIHE rent increases, with SSC office bearers being given discretion to amend this in individual cases should it cause financial hardship. The current portfolio of houses owned by the Fund was also noted and the SSC recognised that the availability of these continues to meet a real need.

In relation to Assembly Buildings, the water ingress, which has been a problem for some 20 years, has been resolved. There is currently a major on-going project to replace the water tanks. In January 2025 there was some damage from Storm Éowyn, but this has been sorted and should be covered by insurance. The wide range of conferences, and other bookings, both in 2024 and planned for 2025 was noted. In 2024, conferences produced net income of £220K and at the date of this report there were bookings of £204K for 2025 and £121K for 2026.

Information Technology

3. The SSC reviewed and discussed the continuing activities across a wide variety of projects and systems, along with proposed projects for 2025. Work for the Council for Social Witness continues to be a significant part of the workload. In the light of the workload and risks associated with IT, together with the issues around recruitment and salaries, a separate sub group was convened to explore the restructuring and enhancement of the IT department. Consideration was given to addressing PCI's IT needs for the next two to three years, succession planning for the current Head of IT, software development, future strategic projects, compliance, governance etc., and it was recognised that additional resources were urgently required even for business-as-usual operations, ensuring business continuity. The SSC agreed to a restructuring proposal which will involve several additional staff, with some extra cost.

B. FINANCE MATTERS

Assessments

4. The SSC considered the projected accounts for 2024 and budgets for 2025 for the various Congregational Assessment Funds. Based on these, the SSC decided that there could be a reduction in the income from assessments and agreed that the 2025 Band 2 assessment percentage be reduced by 1.50%. The proposed 2025 Assessment rates are as shown in Appendix 1.

This reduction would mean that a congregation with assessable income of £65,000 or over would see a reduction in assessments for 2025 of about £810. A summary of fund allocations is attached at Appendix 1.

The 2024 employer's contribution rate to the Pension Scheme was 24%, based on the actuarial valuation of the scheme at 31 December 2020. Every three years a formal valuation of the Pension Scheme must be carried out and the Trustees shared with the SSC the draft actuarial valuation of the scheme at 31 December 2023. It showed that, to maintain the same level of funding, the overall contribution rate could reduce to 20.1%, meaning the employer's contribution rate could reduce to 13.1%. The Trustees, in consultation with the SSC, considered that, whilst the opportunity to avail of a reduction in the rate of employer contribution should be taken, it might be useful to be a bit more prudent. Therefore, the Trustees considered that an employer contribution rate of 17.5% would be appropriate. The SSC was content with this and that the employer contribution charged to congregations should be 17.5%

Pay and Stipend Increases

5. The SSC received a report which addressed issues such as the cost-of-living pressures, recent salary and stipend increases and information on salary increases generally. Following some initial discussion, the members of the SSC who would be affected by any increase left the meeting and the remainder of the SSC (including the Convenor of the General Council and the Convenor of the Committee) agreed on a recommended rate of increase of 3.5%, which was subsequently endorsed by the General Council.

Council for Social Witness Financial Situation

6. The SSC continues to monitor the financial situation in CSW and the steps being taken to regularise the position.

The figures for 2024 show a very significant improvement in financial performance since last year, with the deficit down from £1.995m to £691K. After making a few adjustments to take out non-cash costs such as depreciation and some non-recurring items, CSW was cash positive in the year. The CSW budget for 2025 shows a breakeven situation.

Accounts and Financial Outturn

7. The SSC appointed new auditors, Moore Kingston Smith, to audit the 2024 financial statements. Final statutory accounts for 2024 will not be available until later in the year and therefore an accounts booklet is not available for the General Assembly. Instead, a separate brief 'Financial Summary 2024' will be provided.

Prolonged Disability Fund

8. The Prolonged Disability Fund contains several references to 'age 65'. This was to align with the then PCI normal retirement age, but that is currently 66 and will most likely move to 67 soon. The SSC proposed to the General Council, and it was agreed that the rules to replace references to 'age 65' with references to 'normal retirement age' rather than any specific age. A resolution is appended to make this interim change for the ensuing year and to make the permanent change at the 2026 General Assembly.

Pensions

9. The following ministerial retirements have been noted since the Committee’s report to the General Assembly in June 2024.

Name	Congregation	Retirement Date	Approval Sought
Rev Jackie (JA) Spence	Upper & Lower Clonaneese	21/09/2025	Yes
Rev (SJ) Mervyn Lindsay	Pomeroy & Sandholes	12/01/2026 (on or after)	Yes
Rev Stephen Patrick Moore	Gilnahirk	15/09/2025 (on or after)	Yes
Rev Rodney Thompson	Badoney, Corrick & Glenelly	30/06/2025	No
Rev Frank Sellar	East Belfast (Retired)	02/11/2024	No
Rev Colin Megaw	Helen’s Bay	05/01/2025	No

SUPPORT SERVICES - APPENDIX 1

BUDGETED ASSESSMENT INCOME REQUIREMENTS FOR 2025 (with comparison to 2024 actual and budgeted income)

	2025 Allocation	2025 Budget	2024 Actual	2024 Budget
Central Ministry Fund	36.4%	1,250,000	1,243,961	1,250,000
Retired Ministers' Fund	0.0%	0	0	Nil
Widows of Ministers' Fund	0.0%	0	220,930	225,000
Prolonged Disability Fund	1.5%	50,000	173,344	175,000
Incidental Fund	25.5%	875,000	884,087	900,000
Church House External Work	13.1%	450,000	441,771	450,000
Ministerial Development	0.0%	0	25,908	25,000
Sick Supply Fund	0.0%	0	4,816	5,000
Students' Bursary Fund	13.1%	450,000	392,849	375,000
Communications Department	10.3%	355,000	344,456	350,000
TOTAL ASSESSMENTS (Excl Pension)	100.0	3,430,000	3,732,123	3,755,000

RATES OF ASSESSMENT FOR 2025

Band	From (£)	To (£)	Rate (%)
1	0	15,000	0%
2	15,001	65,000	10.0%
3	65,001	130,000	11.0%
4	130,001	195,000	7.50%
5	195,001	260,000	3.75%
6	260,001	above	3.75%

SUPPORT SERVICES - APPENDIX 2

BASIC MINISTERIAL MINIMUM FOR 2025 (and other rates)

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2025 (£)	2024 (£)	2025 (€)	2024 (€)
1. BASIC AND APPROPRIATE MINISTERIAL MINIMUM				
Basic Ministerial Minimum (BMM)	31,770	30,696	46,508	44,935
After 1 year's service	32,088	31,003	46,972	45,384
After 2 years' service	32,406	31,310	47,437	45,833
After 3 years' service	32,724	31,617	47,902	46,282
After 4 years' service	33,041	31,924	48,367	46,731
After 5 years' service	33,359	32,231	48,831	47,180
After 6 years' service	33,677	32,538	49,296	47,629
After 7 years' service	33,995	32,845	49,761	48,078
After 8 years' service	34,312	33,152	50,225	48,527
After 9 years' service	34,630	33,459	50,690	48,976
After 10 years' service	34,948	33,766	51,155	49,425
After 11 years' service	35,266	34,073	51,620	49,874
After 12 years' service	35,583	34,380	52,084	50,323
After 13 years' service	35,901	34,687	52,549	50,772
After 14 years' service	36,219	34,994	53,014	51,221
After 15 years' service	36,537	35,301	53,478	51,670
After 16 years' service	36,854	35,608	53,943	52,119
After 17 years' service	37,172	35,915	54,408	52,568
After 18 years' service	37,490	36,222	54,873	53,017
After 19 years' service	37,808	36,529	55,337	53,466
After 20 years' service	38,125	36,836	55,802	53,915

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2025 (£)	2024 (£)	2025 (€)	2024 (€)
2. RETIRED MINISTERS' FUND				
Pension (maximum)	15,158	14,646	Stg converted figure	
3. WIDOWS OF MINISTERS' FUND				
Pension (maximum)	8,337	8,055	Stg converted figure	
4. PROLONGED DISABILITY FUND				
Grant (maximum)	15,158	14,728	Stg converted figure	
5. REGIUM DONUM				
Annual Payment	360	360	Stg converted figure	
6. SUPPLY FEES				
Two or more services	128	124	186	179
Single service (at 2/3rd of above)	85	83	124	119
Travel – mileage rate	18p	18p	26c	26c
7. VACANCY CONVENERS' FEES				
Supply Fee plus				
< 100 Families + 0%	128	124	186	179
100<200 Families + 5%	130	130	188	188
200<300 families +10%	136	136	197	197
300+ Families + 15%	143	143	206	206
Travel - mileage rate	18p	18c	26c	26c

	Northern Ireland		Ireland	
	2025 (£)	2024 (£)	2025 (€)	2024 (€)
8. EXPENSES				
Ministers' Car Allowance	4,432	4,221	6,441	6,134
Ministers' Taxable (Duties/Manse) Allowance	2,956	2,815	4,867	4,635
Associates' Car Allowance	4,432	4,221		
Associates' Taxable Duties Allowance	2,463	2,346		
Associates' House Allowance (CMF Max)	1,000	1,000	These figures would be based on a percentage of a minister's RoI allowances.	
Licentiate's Car Allowance (80%)	3,546	3,378		
Licentiate's Duties Allowance (42%)	1,242	1,183		
Ordained Assistants' Travel Allowance	4,432	4,221		
Ordained Assistants' Duties Allowance	1,242	1,183		
9. OTHER				
Ignored for Augmented Grant Par.316(2)(d)(i) (i.e. 52 weeks' supply fee)	6,656	6,448	9,672	9,308
Ignored for Augmented Grant Par.316(2)(d)(ii)	2,400	2,400	-	-
10. FAMILY GRANTS				
Cat. 1 - Birth to final year primary school				
– Child Allowance	455	433	679	647
– Tuition Grants	0	0	561	534
Cat. 2 - Secondary School				
– Child Allowance	665	633	1,005	957
– Tuition Grants	0	0	945	900
Cat. 3 - Further and Higher Education (to 24)				
– Child Allowance	996	949	1,477	1,407
– Tuition Grants	2,415	2,300	4,723	4,498

The above are maximum amounts as reduction apply above certain income levels.

SUPPORT SERVICES – APPENDIX 3**INCIDENTAL FUND BUDGET**

	2025 Budget (£)	2024 Actual (£)
PAYMENTS TO/ON BEHALF OF COUNCILS		
General Council / Board	106,100	67,795
Linkage Commission	41,400	17,493
Historical Society	23,000	23,000
Employment Law/ Health and Safety (Peninsula)	16,000	17,290
Youth Link	12,300	11,988
UK Borders Agency	250	239
Public Affairs (incl Educational grants)	11,800	6,455
UTC Support Services rebate	60,000	60,000
	270,850	204,260
OTHER COSTS		
General Secretary's Office	491,000	475,291
Support Service Charge	194,000	177,176
Postage, Admin and Other	10,000	10,187
Council and Committee member expenses	15,400	11,435
Moderator's Expenses	39,800	35,654
Printing and Stationery	13,800	11,604
Legal	19,300	36,311
Insurance	20,200	19,702
	804,100	777,360
TOTAL	1,074,950	981,620

DAVID THOMSON, Convenor

APPENDIX 4

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT STAFFING

Sterling Salary Scales of posts in Assembly Buildings on 1 January 2025

Listed below are staff that are currently on the General Council Executive and Administrative scales.

EXECUTIVE POSTS

Scale 1 (£30,038 – £35,688)

- Senior Infrastructure Engineer x 2 (IT)
- Operations and Maintenance Officer (PSD)
- Recruitment Executive (0.9 post) (HR)

Scale 2 (£33,922 – £40,806)

- Children's Development Officer (CCLW)
- Editorial Officer (CCLW)
- Women's Ministry and PW Development Officer (CCLW)
- Finance Manager (FSD)
- Creative Production Support Officer (CD)
- Payroll and Assessment Manager (FSD)
- HR Executive (3 p/t posts) (HR)
- Youth Development Officer (CCLW)
- Mission Support Officer (Partnership) (MD)
- Network Storage and Security Manager (IT)
- Operations and Services Manager (IT)
- Senior Analyst Developer (IT)

Scale 3 (£37,954 – £46,258)

- Property Support Officer (FSD)
- Finance Manager (FSD)
- Mission Support Officer (Member Care) (MD)
- Creative Production Officer (CD)
- Programme Development Officer (CCLW)
- Public Affairs Officer (GSD)
- Congregational Life Development Officer (CCLW)
- Mission Development Officer (CCLW)

Head of Conferencing and Operations (PSD)
 Safeguarding Officer (CSW)
 Congregational Witness Development Officer (CCLW)

Scale 4 (£41,834 – £52,263)

Senior Finance Manager (FSD)
 Head of Communications (CD)
 Safeguarding Lead (CSW) (higher salary protected)

Scale 5 (£46,258 – £56,371)

Head of Human Resources (HR)
 Head of IT (IT)

Scale 6 (£49,683 – £60,527)

Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly and Deputy General Secretary
 Secretary of the Council for Mission in Ireland
 Secretary of the Council for Social Witness
 Secretary of the Council for Global Mission
 Secretary of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness

Scale 7 (£56,371 – £72,510)

Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary
 Financial Secretary

ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS**Scale 2 (£20,700 – £21,275)**

HR Assistant (0.8 post) (HR)
 Operations and Maintenance Assistant (PSD)
 Assistant Receptionist and Telephonist (PSD) (higher salary protected)
 IT Support Technician (IT)
 Administrative Assistant (MD)
 Communications Assistant (CD)

Scale 3 (£20,700 – £23,868)

Senior Administrative Assistant (GSD)
 Senior HR Assistant (HR)
 Senior Administrative Assistant (job share 1.2 post) (CSW)
 Senior Administrative Assistant, PW (3 x p/t posts) (CCLW)
 Taking Care Administrator (CSW)
 Administrative Assistant (Purchase Ledger) (p/t) (FSD)

Scale 4 (£23,389 – £26,935)

Senior Administrative Assistant (p/t) (CCLW)
 Senior Administrative Assistant (FSD)
 Senior Communications Assistant (p/t) (Press and Web) (CD)
 Senior Administrative Assistant (CCLW)
 Financial Assistant (p/t) (FSD)
 Senior Administrative Assistant (CCLW)

Scale 5 (£25,589 – £29,545)

Senior Creative Production Technician (CD)
 Personal Assistant (MD)
 Senior HR Administrator (HR)
 Personal Assistant and Senior Administrative Assistant (0.8 post) (GSD)
 Personal Assistant and Senior Administrative Assistant (0.5 post) (GSD)
 Payroll and Administrative Assistant (FSD)
 Payroll and Administrative Assistant (.77 post) (FSD)
 Accountant (FSD)

Scale 5 (Enhanced) (£28,262 – £32,308)

Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (CCLW)
 Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (MD)
 Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (CSW)

Scale 5 (Enhanced pt 25-34) (£28,262 – £34,832)

Senior Personal Assistant and Office Supervisor (GSD)

Sterling Salary Scales of posts in other locations on 1 January 2025**Scale 1 (£30,038 – £35,688)**

Rural Chaplain
 Executive Academic Administrator (Union College)

Scale 2 (£33,922 – £40,806)

Lecturer in Biblical Studies (OT), Union College
 Lecturer in Biblical Studies (NT), Union College
 Lecturer in Practical and Pastoral Theology
 Lecturer in Theology
 Senior Executive Academic Administrator, Union College
 College Librarian, Union College
 Operations Manager, Union College
 Chaplain in Residence (MD)
 University Chaplain UUJ, (MD)
 Chaplain NI Prison Service and Co-ordinating Chaplain (Maghaberry)

Scale 3 (£37,954 – £46,258)

Lecturer in Historical Theology, Union College

Scale 5 (£46,258 - £56,371)

Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Director of Post-Graduate Studies,
Union College

Professor of Ministry and Director of the Institute for Ministry, Union
College

Scale 6 (£49,683 – £60,527)

Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of Union Theological
College

ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED POSTS**Scale 2 (£20,011 – £21,275)**

Clerical Officer - Carlisle House (p/t) (CSW)

Clerical Officer, (4 FT and 3 p/t) (CSW)

Clerical Officer, Kinghan Church (p/t) (CSW)

Custodian, (Union College)

Library Assistant (p/t), (Union College)

Receptionist (Union College)

Scale 3 (£20,643 – £23,868)

Senior Clerical Officer (Job Share), Carlisle House (CSW)

Clerical Officer (CSW)

Academic Administrator (UTC)

Scale 4 (£23,389 – £26,935)

Administrator, and Personal Assistant to the Chaplain Derryvolgie (MD)

Scale 5 (Euro €38,972 – Euro €45,030)

Resident Manager, Tritonville Close (Euro Scale) (CSW)

Scale 5 (Enhanced) (£28,262 – £32,308)

Assistant Chaplain, QUB (MD)

PCI PENSION SCHEME REVIEW PANEL

Introduction

1. Following initial work commissioned by General Council, the 2023 General Assembly established a PCI Pension Scheme Review Panel (“the Panel”) to “undertake a fuller review [of the Pension Scheme] and consider alternative options, with decisions then being made on how to proceed”.
2. A short report was presented to 2024 Assembly indicating that the Panel’s review was ongoing and, having considered the outcomes of the Scheme’s 2023 triennial valuation, would present a fuller report to the 2025 Assembly.
3. Technical pensions consultants (Spence and Partners Ltd – “Spence”) were retained to provide expert analysis and help with the determination of possible options.
4. **Initial Option Analysis**
 - (a) **Benchmark**

Spence initially reviewed the current scheme in the context of the recent valuations and carried out a ‘benchmark’ exercise to compare it with pension arrangements of other denominations – Church of England, United Reformed Church, Baptists, Methodists, and Church of Scotland.

This exercise demonstrated that the PCI Scheme was more generous to members (and consequently more expensive) than the other denominational schemes reviewed.
 - (b) **Options Considered**

Spence provided a range of possible options for PCI including the two main ones, which were included in the initial paper to the General Assembly in 2023, namely:

 - (i) **Retain the current Scheme**

No material changes to the current Defined Benefit (DB) Scheme, except for possibly a few minor amendments to reflect regulatory changes and emerging best practice across the pension industry. In this scenario PCI continues to carry the full funding risk of the Scheme.
 - (ii) **Close the current Scheme**

The current Scheme would close (though existing members would retain all of their previously built up benefits). A new Defined Contribution (DC) scheme would be established whereby members and PCI would pay a defined amount into the scheme and the pension payable on retirement would be determined by funds in the Scheme at the time. In this scenario members carry the risk of benefits fluctuating.

However, between these extremes Spence identified a range of other options including various hybrid schemes (effectively combinations of DB and DC schemes with varying levels of benefit) and introduced options for varying the timing of introduction ('phasing in') of any new schemes.

(c) Contribution Rates

Overall contribution rates and the sharing of risk were key drivers in setting up the review. Over the last few decades, many organisations have adopted DC pension schemes, resulting in contribution rates which are much lower and not at risk of having to be increased. The Pensions Regulator identified in 2023 that only 4% of DB schemes in the charity sector were fully open.

In considering the range of options, the Panel considered it important, as far as reasonably possible, to compare 'apples with apples'. All numerical analysis was therefore based on the existing overall scheme contribution rate of 24.5% (17.5% Employer, 7% member).

It should be noted that this contribution rate is slightly higher than required by the Scheme's triennial valuation and on a stipend of £35,000 means an ongoing contribution of £6,125 from the congregation. In line with the findings of the benchmark exercise referenced above, this rate is high in the context of the wider sector.

(d) Benefit Flexibility

In addition to reviewing headline contribution or benefit rates, Spence outlined some enhanced options for flexibility of pension drawdown which would become available by switching to any of the DC scheme options under consideration.

However, Spence also noted that introducing a hybrid option rather than a full DC option was likely to generate a significant additional administrative cost / burden.

(e) Pension Increases

Spence noted as part of their review / analysis work that the current Scheme has different annual pension increase for Active members when compared to Deferred or Retired members. The increase for Active members is based on 'uncapped RPI' which is essentially a defunct measure. The Deferred and Retired increases are based on CPI, capped at 2.5%.

They suggested that, regardless of the option chosen, it would be considered good industry practice to harmonise these increases across the Scheme. This is corroborated by the fact that this same recommendation has been brought to Trustees previously by Isio (advisers to the Trustees Pension Fund). The suggested rate of alignment was to set all increases at CPI with a new 5% cap.

5. Initial Conclusions

The full range of options was reviewed with Spence in November 2024 and, after discussion, it was agreed to proceed with detailed analysis and further consideration of three main options:

- (a) No Change
Retaining the DB scheme with current benefit accrual rates
- (b) New Hybrid Scheme
Set up a new hybrid scheme comprising a reduced DB accrual rate element (1/100 reduced from 1/70) alongside a 7% DC top-up.
- (c) New full DC Scheme
Establish new full DC scheme for all active members based on 7% employee and 14% employer contributions.

6. Detailed Option Analysis

- (a) The selected options were considered in a further meeting with Spence in February 2025.
- (b) As one of the main concerns identified in implementing the review was the risk of future funding shortfalls, Spence used stochastic modelling¹ to assess the potential future assets and liabilities under each of the options over the next 20 years. For each of the options considered they ran 1,000 simulations and assessed the probabilities of various outcomes.
- (c) In summary, this modelling indicated that
 - the current level of funding risk is low
 - in over 90% of outcomes significant surpluses are expected
 - in all options, the expected value of the Scheme surplus in 20 years is in the region of £90m
 - the option with the highest probability of pushing the Scheme into deficit is 'do nothing', with a probability of 7%
 - option 3 (establish DC scheme) provides the lowest probability of generating a deficit, with a probability of 5%
 - across the options, the probability of the Scheme being in deficit in 20 years is 5%–7%
- (d) This means that, based on the current level of funding, there is currently a low risk of the Scheme generating a deficit within the next 20 years.
- (e) Following their detailed analysis, Spence concluded that there is no immediate imperative to change the current pension design. They did also note that the current design is generous to members and should PCI wish to make more fundamental changes to the Scheme, their preferred option would be the introduction of a hybrid scheme as it is likely to:

1 A form of financial model that forecasts the probability of various outcomes under different conditions, using random variables.

- provide slightly increased overall benefits for members
- provide improved flexibility in pension drawdown options on retirement
- deliver the risk sharing objective initially sought by the church

This option would however increase (possibly significantly) the overall administrative burden / cost of the Scheme.

7. Conclusions

Having reviewed the detailed analysis and its conclusions with Spence, and after further discussion when Spence representatives had left the meeting, the Panel was of the view that:

- (a) there is no immediate imperative to change the fundamental Scheme design
- (b) the analysis demonstrates that the current Scheme design is more sustainable than previously thought because:
 - the Scheme is well funded
 - the employer contribution rate is considered relatively affordable
 - the future deficit risk is low
- (c) the current Scheme is more generous, and accordingly more expensive to manage, than other church schemes so the affordability of the scheme to congregations should be kept under review.
- (d) while the current DB structure is relatively inflexible for members in relation to pension drawdown at retirement, it has the strong positive attributes of being guaranteed and relatively easy for members to understand
- (e) the additional administrative burden of adopting a hybrid scheme would need to be considered before adopting that approach
- (f) consideration should be given to aligning annual pension increases as advised by both Spence and Isio

8. Recommendations of the PCI Pension Scheme Review Panel to the General Assembly:

The Panel recommends to the General Assembly that:

- (a) the existing accrual rates and benefit structure should remain unchanged
- (b) the funding position should be monitored regularly using the data from triennial valuations
- (c) affordability of the ‘higher than average’ contribution rates for congregations should be monitored
- (d) pension increases should be aligned to CPI capped at 5% in employment, deferment, and retirement.

DAVID THOMSON, Convenor of PCI Pension Review Panel

GENERAL COUNCIL

SECTION 3

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. Since the last meeting of the General Assembly, the General Assembly Advisory Committee (GAAC) met on four occasions – 13 August and 4 November 2024 and 10 March and 7 April 2025 – to carry forward both its core remit and other matters referred to it by the General Council. As with other years, each of these meetings was lengthy and dealt with a significant range of important, and often complex, issues. Thanks are due to the members of the GAAC for their diligence in dealing with this heavy work-load.
2. **Taking forward staffing matters arising from the decisions of the 2024 General Assembly in relation to the reconfiguration of ministry**
 - (a) The 2024 General Assembly agreed that the Linkage Commission should be the General Assembly body to take forward Reconfiguration of Ministry with Presbyteries and that a new Reconfiguration Committee be set up with a salaried Convener to coordinate this work. The following resolution was passed by the Assembly (underlining for emphasis):

That a post of Convener of the Reconfiguration Committee, is created, remunerated on the basis of 25% of a full-time post. The convener of this Committee will lead in the interaction between the Commission and presbyteries.
 - (b) The Assembly also passed the following resolution (underlining for emphasis):

That the General Council be delegated authority to take all decisions necessary on behalf of the General Assembly in relation to any unforeseen matters resulting from the implementation of the agreed decisions in relation to the Reconfiguration of Ministry Report, including (but not restricted to) any required resourcing matters or staffing readjustments/appointments.
 - (c) The GAAC at its meeting in August 2024 gave preliminary consideration to this issue, and having received advice and recommendations from a number of key conveners, agreed to recommend to the General Council that the person best positioned to take on the responsibility of being Convener of the Reconfiguration Committee, was in fact, the current Deputy Clerk, the Rev Dr David Allen.

- (d) In parallel it was noted that Dr Allen, recently informed the Clerk of Assembly of two important separate, but related, matters:
- (i) Firstly, that he would not be applying for the post of Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland when that post becomes vacant.
 - The implication of (i) being that another person would have to ‘learn the job’ by working alongside and shadowing the current Clerk / General Secretary, who is likely to retire by September 2027 / start of 2028, or earlier.
 - (ii) Secondly, that he was requesting to move to part-time working for the final years of his employment with PCI, but that he would be willing to carry out the work envisaged in relation to the new role of ‘Convener of the Reconfiguration Committee’, as outlined above, and indeed would have a definite interest (sense of call) in doing so.
- (e) Noting points (i) and (ii) above, the GAAC recommended, and the General Council at its meeting in September 2024 agreed, to seek to recruit a new Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly and Deputy General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who would also be deemed Clerk Designate of the General Assembly and General Secretary Designate. If this proved successful, Dr Allen would (by agreement) revert to the part-time post of Assistant Clerk of Assembly and Assistant General Secretary.
- (f) When this recruitment exercise proved to be unsuccessful, and having considered the matter further, the GAAC recommended, and the General Council at its meeting in November 2024 agreed:
- (i) to proceed to appoint a new Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly and Deputy General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, with a selection/interview panel agreed;
 - (ii) to request the 2025 General Assembly to approve the recruitment of a Clerk Designate and General Secretary Designate, for appointment at the 2026 General Assembly
3. **The appointment of the new Deputy Clerk of Assembly and Deputy General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland**
- (a) Following advertisement, short-listing and interview, the agreed selection/interview panel brought the nomination of the Rev Peter Gamble (Minister of The Mall, Armagh) to the March 2025 meeting of the General Council.
 - (b) The General Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, unanimously agreed to appoint Mr Gamble to this post, effective from 19 May 2025. Having subscribed to the Confession of Faith, the Moderator declared that the Rev E. Peter Gamble was appointed Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly and Deputy General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and instructed that he be made a member of the appropriate Courts of the Church.

4. **The appointment of an Acting Clerk of Assembly and Acting General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland**

- (a) At the same March meeting of the General Council, the GAAC also brought recommendations regarding the way forward in relation to the appointment of an Acting Clerk of the General Assembly and Acting General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, following the nomination of the current Clerk as Moderator Designate.
- (b) It was agreed that Rev Dr David Allen be appointed Acting Clerk and Acting General Secretary, from Monday 12 May 2025 to Monday 31 August 2026, Dr Allen having agreed to defer his move to part-time working as Assistant Clerk until September 2026 (see points 2(e) and (f) above). Having subscribed to the Confession of Faith, the Moderator declared that the Rev T. David Allen was appointed Acting Clerk of the General Assembly and Acting General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and instructed that he continue as a member of the appropriate Courts of the Church.
- (c) A number of arrangements were put in place to seek to lessen the Acting Clerk's workload during the incoming year, especially as he will continue to lead in regard to reconfiguration of ministry. Also, as he will have to prepare for the 2025 Assembly as Acting Clerk, and as the new Deputy Clerk will just have taken up post, it was agreed to appoint the former Deputy Clerk, the Rev Jim Stothers, to the role of Minute Secretary for the 2025 Assembly. Mr Stothers will also be assisting in a number of other ways, including with the preparation of the 2025 Reports.

5. **The recruitment of a Clerk of Assembly (Designate) and General Secretary (Designate)**

The GAAC brought a draft proposal to the April meeting of the General Council for the appointment of a Clerk of Assembly Designate and General Secretary Designate of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. These were agreed by the General Council for transmission to the 2025 General Assembly for approval (see point 2(f)(ii) above) and are outlined in Appendix 1, with the proposed Job Description in Appendix 1(a) and the proposed Personnel Specification in Appendix 1(b). A resolution is appended for consideration of the Assembly.

6. **The report of the Church Relations Convener**, the Rev Helen Freeburn, in regard to inter-church relations in Ireland, was received by the Committee and can be found at Appendix 2.

7. An update report was received from the Theological Engagement Group. The PCI membership of the group has changed slightly with the Revs John Faris and John Seawright stepping back from the team and the Rev Dr Graham Shearer joining. Thanks are due to both colleagues for their contribution to the work, along with acknowledgement of the work of the former convener, Rev Prof J. Stafford Carson.

The PCI delegation is now: Rev Principal M. McClenahan (convener), Rev Dr Martyn Cowan, Rev Nigel Craig, the Very Rev Dr Trevor Morrow, Rev Dr Graham Shearer, Rev Joanne Smith, Prof John Gillespie, Dr Patrick Mitchel, Dr Zoe O'Neill. The PCI delegates met by Teams on 17 January 2025 to review the work to date and plan for the future engagement. The meeting was held at Holy Cross Abbey, Rostrevor. Two papers were discussed – one from Dr Terence Crotty OP and one from Dr Patrick Mitchel. The papers were on the different ways in which the different churches understand the doctrine of justification. Discussion was careful and informative.

8. Reports were received from Presbyteries in regard to **Ministers without Charge and Licentiates not currently serving in an Assistantship**, as well as reports in regard to **Ministers Emeritus**.

(a) The Committee took time to consider in detail the reports received from Presbyteries regarding **Ministers without Charge and Licentiates not in Assistantships** under their care. This piece of work is largely noting and confirming the decisions taken by Presbyteries. A summary report is forwarded to the General Assembly in line with previous years – see Appendix 3.

(b) The Committee took time to consider in detail the reports received from Presbyteries regarding **Ministers Emeritus** under their care. All Ministers Emeritus are now required to indicate annually to their Presbytery if they wish to retain that status, and fulfil the responsibilities that go with it, or become a Minister Emeritus (Released). The names and Presbyteries of the former Ministers Emeritus who have changed status during the past year to being Ministers Emeritus (Released) are as follows:

Rev Christina Bradley (Armagh); Revs Robert Love and Wilfred Orr (South Belfast); Revs William McKeown and George Moffett (East Belfast); Rev James Lamont (Derry and Donegal); Rev Robert Tosh (Dromore); Rev Purvis Campbell (Dublin and Munster); Rev William Orr (Iveagh)

In addition, the Presbytery of South Belfast had asked the Committee to decide on the status of a particular Minister Emeritus. Discussion took place on the matter and it was agreed to write to the Presbytery informing it that the Committee is not authorised to take a decision on the status of a Minister Emeritus and advising the Presbytery to write to this Minister.

9. The report of the Task Group on the Admission to Baptism of Children of Unmarried Parents, that had been set up after the 2024 General Assembly received a Memorial from the Monaghan Presbytery, which is included in Appendix 4 and a resolution is presented to the Assembly to enact the proposed guidelines.

10. In light of the ongoing review of General Assembly structures and resources, advice was given to the Priorities Reference Panel that, for the period of the structures and resources review, the Panel should not normally approve the establishment of permanent posts serving under the General Assembly's Councils. This position was accepted by the Priorities Reference Panel and confirmed by the General Council.
11. The Financial Secretary reported to the Committee that a £200k bequest had been received during 2024 which had been allocated to the General Assembly Discretionary Fund, bringing the total amount in the Fund to £1.186m. There is some already allocated for UTC 'transitional funding' (total of £110K spread from 2025–2028) but at current levels of investment this charge will likely be covered by the annual income. The Committee recommended, and the General Council agreed, that an additional £75,000pa for three years be allocated from the General Assembly Discretionary Fund to Union Theological College for additional transitional funding.
12. **Safeguarding – decisions taken and reported for information**
 - (a) Following a detailed report on Safeguarding in Supplementary Reports, the 2024 General Assembly passed the following resolution:

That the General Assembly Advisory Committee be delegated authority to take all decisions necessary on behalf of the General Assembly regarding both the allocation of resources and the putting into place of new governance arrangements, for the review of Safeguarding within PCI.
 - (b) At its August meeting the GAAC received a detailed paper from the CSW Council Secretary, Convener and the Acting Head of Safeguarding, entitled 'PCI Safeguarding Review – Structures and Roles'. It reported on the pressing need to take forward three interrelated pieces of work, namely: (1) Development of relevant and practical safeguarding policies and procedures for PCI; (2) Review of historical safeguarding practice and (3) Enhancement of the strand 1 work by incorporation of learning from the historical review.
 - (c) In response, and acting on behalf of the General Assembly with the delegated authority outlined above, the GAAC resolved:
 - (i) That the structural proposals for the ongoing oversight of safeguarding, contained in the tabled paper were adopted and specifically:
 - The then CSW 'Safeguarding Panel' was thanked for its services and discharged.
 - A new 'Safeguarding Development Committee' was appointed as a General Assembly Committee under the Council for Social Witness.

(ii) The proposals to take forward the Historical Review of Safeguarding, were approved and that specifically:

- The recommendations regarding the appointment and function of an independent ‘Safeguarding Review Chair’ were adopted.
- The recommendations regarding composition and Terms of Reference of the ‘Safeguarding Review Team’ were adopted and the recruitment and appointment of the three new temporary posts (2 CSW Review Project Officers and 1 Review Team Admin Officer) were approved.
- The recommendations regarding the Review Team governance structure were adopted.

It was agreed that all costs relating to the Review of Safeguarding be a charge upon PCI’s Incidental Fund.

13. Advice given to the Council for Mission in Ireland and the Linkage Commission

The Council for Mission in Ireland (CMI) raised two matters with the Clerk of Assembly seeking advice and these were tabled for discussion at the August meeting of the GAAC. Following deliberations, the Committee firstly advised that normally, a call should not be issued to an ordained minister who applies for and is appointed to a non-ordained employed mission post under CMI. On the second matter that had been raised, the Committee offered advice to CMI and the Linkage Commission as to how a Home Mission Minister’s position should be protected when his/her congregation leaves the Home Mission under the recently approved scheme.

14. Sustainability of some Presbyteries

A letter from the Route Presbytery to the Linkage Commission was tabled at a meeting of the General Council for consideration as it fell beyond the remit of the Linkage Commission alone. The Council asked the GAAC to confer with Rev Ker Graham, Convener of the Linkage Commission. Following discussion, it was agreed to recommend to the General Council:

- (a) That a Task Group be appointed to consider the sustainability of the Route Presbytery in consultation with it and neighbouring Presbyteries.
- (b) That the Task Group be authorised to initiate similar reviews if requested from other Presbyteries/areas.

This was agreed by the General Council and at the time of writing the Task Group is being formed.

15. Correspondence and conversations with representatives of Christian Aid

- (a) On 25 August 2024, an article was published in the *Belfast Newsletter*, referring to the production by Christian Aid and others, of a paper entitled “Queering the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda – a practice-based toolkit”.

- (b) The production of the paper involved input from Christian Aid, funded by The British Academy, and with a research and authoring team led by Dr Jamie J. Hagan, Lecturer in International Relations at Queen's University, Belfast, and the founder of the Centre for Gender and Politics. The paper was published on the Christian Aid and QUB websites.
- (c) The publication and contents of the paper raised concerns at Presbytery level, and the matter was raised formally with the Clerk of Assembly by the Ballymena and Route presbyteries.
- (d) The GAAC considered this matter reported initially to the meeting of General Council in November 2024. Appendix 6 contains a full report on the outcome of those and subsequent deliberations.
- (e) Following full discussion, the General Council at its meeting in March 2025, on the recommendation of the GAAC, resolved as follows:
 - (i) That the General Council recommends to the General Assembly that, as an interim measure for the 2025 World Development Appeal, and any Moderator's Appeal, a change is made to current practice, to allow congregations, if they so desire, to specify to which development agency (Christian Aid or Tear Fund) their donation be sent, and that no differences in the amounts allocated between agencies be "made up" centrally. (An appropriate resolution is brought for consideration of the General Assembly.)
 - (ii) That the General Council forward the contents of this summary report (Appendix 2) to the Structures and Resources Review Panel to inform the active discussions on 'Mission and Development' currently being undertaken.

16. **Communication to congregations regarding the 2025 World Development Appeal**

- (a) In light of General Council's recommendation to the General Assembly regarding the allocation of the 2025 World Development Appeal (see paragraph 15(e)(ii) above), the GAAC was asked to consider the appropriate information that might be provided to congregations concerning the 2025 World Development Appeal.
- (b) The GAAC recommended to the April meeting of the General Council and it was agreed, that if the General Assembly agree the recommended allocation of the 2025 World Development Appeal, then:

All Kirk Sessions are informed:

1. *That the General Council has raised concerns with Christian Aid regarding aspects of its apparent position in relation to LGBT issues and policy. That these concerns have not yet been satisfactorily addressed and there will be further consideration as to how best to proceed in the coming months.*

2. *As an interim measure the General Assembly has decided that the division of 2025 World Development Appeal contributions shall be as follows:*

2.1 *That 5% of all contributions to the 2025 World Development appeal will be allocated as normal to the Council for Global Mission, to assist with development work through Partner Churches.*

2.2 *That the remainder of all contributions will be divided equally between Christian Aid and Tear Fund, unless the Kirk Session decides in advance that this will go to only one of these agencies.*

That points 1. and 2. be included in the publicity material for the 2025 World Development Appeal and that any decision of a Kirk Session to vary from the ‘equal division’ principle be communicated to the congregation in advance of appeal material being distributed.

17. **Four Memorials that had been transmitted for consideration by the 2025 General Assembly, were considered by the GAAC.**

- (a) The Memorial of the Kirk Session of First Bangor – seeking to change the name of the Congregation to ‘City Church, Bangor’. It was noted that this is in order and is supported by the Presbytery of Ards.
- (b) The Memorial of the Kirk Session of Carnmoney – seeking authority for the Presbytery of South Belfast Presbytery to establish ‘Central Belfast’ as a Congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (within the Urban Mission). It was noted that this is in order and is supported by the Presbytery of North Belfast.
- (c) The Memorial of the Presbytery of Armagh – in regard to the office of ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament.
- (d) The Memorial of the Presbytery of Down – in regard to the office of Deacon.

Following detailed discussion, it was recognised that the subjects in the Memorials of the Armagh and Down Presbyteries were closely related. Therefore, if the 2025 General Assembly felt these issues should be examined, it would be best to appoint one group to look at both issues. It was therefore agreed to propose to the General Council that it recommend that, if the 2025 General Assembly agree that the issues contained in the Memorials of the Armagh and Down Presbyteries should be examined, an Ad-Hoc Panel be appointed to consider both together. This should include the consideration of what is meant by ordination and the offices to which ordination should apply within PCI, including the role of any such ordained office. This was agreed by the General Council and an appropriate resolution is brought along with the Memorials for consideration of the General Assembly.

18. Evangelical Presbyterian Church (USA)

The GACC noted that the 2024 General Assembly had agreed: “That an appropriate report and resolution be brought to the 2025 General Assembly to formalise a relationship (Fraternal – Confessional) and that a representative of EPC(USA) be invited to be present at the 2025 General Assembly when the relationship is being formalised.”

Following discussion, it was agreed to recommend to the General Council that the Affirmation in Appendix 5 be transmitted to the 2025 General Assembly. This was agreed by the General Council and an appropriate resolution is brought for consideration of the General Assembly

A representative from the EPC(USA) will be present at PCI’s 2025 General Assembly, and the current Clerk of Assembly (by then Moderator of Assembly) will be present at the EPC(USA) 2025 General Assembly, meeting in Detroit from Tuesday 17 to Thursday 19 June 2025.

TREVOR D. GRIBBEN, Convener

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 1

Appointment process for the Clerk Designate post

1. It is recommended that the 2025 General Assembly be invited to adopt the following appointment process:
 - (a) That the post be advertised in early 2026, by e-mail to all active Ministers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (including Ministers in Specialised Service and Ministers without Charge).
 - (b) That the Panel to take forward the selection/interview process be as follows:
 - The Moderator of the General Assembly
 - The Acting Clerk of the General Assembly
 - Very Rev Dr David Bruce (Convener of the General Council) – to Convene the Panel
 - Rev Daniel Kane (Convener of the Council for Public Affairs)
 - Rev Norman Cameron (Convener of the Judicial Commission)
 - Mr Hugo Wilson (Convener of the Support Services Committee)
 - Rev David Irvine (Convener General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel)
 - Rev Helen Freeburn (Church Relations Convener)
 - Mr Stephen Johnston (Chair of Trustees; Pension Trustee)
 - Rev Dr Trevor McCormick (General Assembly Advisory Committee; Presbytery Clerk)
 - Mrs Avril Heenan (General Assembly Structures and Resources Review Panel; former Trustee)
 - Rev Robert Herron (Holding Trustee Convener; former Presbytery Clerk)
 - Mrs Sarah Leung (The Head of Human Resources)
 - (c) That the Panel bring a nominee through the General Council, for appointment by the 2026 General Assembly, to take up post on 1 September 2026.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 1A

JOB DESCRIPTION

Job Title:

Clerk Designate of the General Assembly and General Secretary Designate of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Salary Scale:

Scale E6

Responsible to:

The Clerk of the General Assembly

Main functions of job:

To contribute to the Christian ministry and mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland through the delivery of the duties outlined.

To be an active member of the General Assembly's staff team, contributing to the effective administration of its functions and assisting in the development of strategies and plans for the delivery of its agreed objective in a manner in keeping with the Christian ethos of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Under the Leadership of the Clerk of the General Assembly to assist with the implementation of decisions of the General Assembly relevant to the Council and to carry forward its delegated responsibilities.

To assist and, where appropriate, deputise for the Clerk and General Secretary in the performance of his duties and to carry out designated Secretarial functions.

To succeed the current Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary on his retirement.

Responsibilities and duties:

Specifically, as Clerk Designate of the General Assembly and General Secretary Designate

1. In a phased manner, and as appropriate, to shadow the Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary in his role and to gain insight into, and understanding of, the responsibilities and duties of the role, on occasions sharing or taking on some specific responsibilities or duties under the direction of the Clerk and General Secretary, including in the areas outlined below.

Note: For information, the current Job Description of the Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is included in Appendix (i). This is a useful guide, but will be subject to future review and potential amendment.

To assist and deputise for the Clerk of Assembly across the range of his duties as required from time to time and, specifically, as follows:

2. To assist the Clerk in his support of Clerks of Presbytery, Ministers and others in leadership positions within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
3. To minute meetings as required.
4. To deputise for the Clerk as required during holidays, illness and other absences.
5. To act in place of the Clerk as required under Par 269(2)(a)(ii) of the Code.
6. To assist the Clerk in representing the Church, as necessary.

To assist and deputise for the General Secretary across the range of his duties as required from time to time and, specifically, as follows:

7. To assist in specific areas of support services provided within Assembly Buildings if required.
8. To deputise for the General Secretary as required during holidays, illness and other absences.

To carry out other duties as follows:

9. To carry out deputation work within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland as appropriate.
10. To carry out any other duties as delegated by the Clerk, as appropriate and reasonable, including in regard to ad-hoc and time-limited pieces of work.
11. To contribute to the overall organisational effectiveness and to perform any other duties as deemed appropriate by the General Assembly or the Clerk of the General Assembly.

APPENDIX (I)

Current Job Description of the Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Job Title:

Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Salary Scale:

Scale E7

Responsible to:

The General Assembly

Main functions of job:

To contribute to the Christian ministry and mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland through the delivery of the duties outlined.

To be an active member of the General Assembly's staff team, contributing to the effective administration of its functions and assisting in the development of strategies and plans for the delivery of its agreed objective in a manner in keeping with the Christian ethos of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Under the Leadership of the General Assembly to assist with the implementation of decisions of the General Assembly through its Councils and to carry forward its delegated responsibilities.

Responsibilities and duties:**Essential Responsibilities:**

1. To develop through the General Council the overall strategy and planning of the work of the General Assembly.
2. To lead the management of change throughout the structures of the General Assembly.
3. To arrange meetings of the General Assembly, including commissions, reports, minutes, correspondence, etc.
4. To coordinate the work of General Assembly Councils and ensure that work which is not the direct responsibility of any Council is allocated.
5. To ensure that the voice and decisions of the General Assembly are heard in the wider society and communicated to government, other Churches and relevant bodies.

6. To convene a priorities committee or working group to identify priorities for the work of the General Assembly and assign tasks if necessary.
7. To ensure that the decisions of the General Assembly are implemented.
8. To advise on The Code and its interpretation and on policy that has been set by the General Assembly.
9. To be available to Clerks of Presbytery, Ministers and others in leadership positions for advice and support.
10. To advise and support Conveners and Council Secretaries to ensure that the decisions of the General Assembly are implemented.
11. To represent the Church, as appropriate, at national, international and ecumenical events.

General Secretary

12. To manage the staff and work of the General Secretary's Office.
13. To act as line-manager for all Council Secretaries with due regard to the responsibilities of Council Conveners.
14. To ensure that the work of Council Secretaries is co-ordinated in order to achieve the General Assembly's cross-cutting objectives and priorities.
15. To ensure that all support services are managed and reports given to the General Council on their discharge.
16. To contribute to the overall organisational effectiveness and to perform any other duties as deemed appropriate by the General Assembly.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 1(B)

PERSONNEL SPECIFICATION

**for the position of Clerk Designate of the General Assembly
and General Secretary Designate
of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland**

Job Title:

Clerk Designate of the General Assembly and General Secretary Designate
of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Salary Grade:

Executive Scale 6

Responsible to:

The Clerk of the General Assembly

CRITERIA

Qualifications and knowledge:

Essential

1. An ordained Minister of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland - the essential nature of this post requires that the successful candidate meet this criterion as provided for under excepted occupations in the Fair Employment Treatment (NI) Order 1998)
2. A degree level qualification
3. A detailed knowledge and understanding of the Code of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland
4. Knowledge of the ethos, practice, structure and governance of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland
5. Knowledge of the work and programmes of the Councils of the Church
6. A knowledge of the inter church, governmental, political and statutory structures in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland
7. Appropriate computer skills i.e. word processing, emailing and utilising databases

Desirable

1. A degree in Theology
2. A broad understanding of all relevant legislation (e.g. Safeguarding)
3. Knowledge and insight regarding the changing landscape of Christian ministry and mission in Ireland.

Relevant Experience:**Essential**

1. A minimum of 5 years' post-ordination ministry experience in a congregational setting
2. Experience of leading or managing others
3. Experience of servicing committees and writing reports
4. Experience in leading in PCI roles at Presbytery level
5. Experience in leading in PCI roles at Denominational level
6. Experience leading in strategic development
7. Experience of change management

Desirable

1. At least 10 years' post-ordination ministry experience in a congregational setting
2. Experience as a Clerk of Presbytery
3. Experience as a Convener of a General Assembly Council or Committee
4. Experience of contributing to policy development
5. Experience of representing an organisation in the media e.g. TV and radio
6. Experience of interacting with politicians and government bodies
7. Experience of acting within a deputising role.
8. Experience of setting and managing budgets

Personal Attributes:**Essential**

1. Demonstrable ability to lead and motivate others through the use of engagement, shared vision and values
2. Demonstrable ability to understand and empathise with those working in parish ministry
3. Demonstrable trust and respect within the wider Presbyterian Church in Ireland
4. Demonstrable ability to foster good working relationships at all levels both within and outside of the Church
5. Demonstrable ability to influence and persuade

6. The ability to respond to confidential and sensitive matters appropriately
7. Good written and oral communication skills including public speaking
8. Strong organisational skills
9. Good conflict resolution and problem-solving skills
10. Good team working skills
11. Ability to take initiative and manage own time effectively
12. The ability to manage change effectively
13. Personal resilience in challenging situations,

Physical Requirements:**Essential**

1. **Health** – such as to allow for attendance reliability and work proficiency (reasonable adjustments will be made for those with a disability)
2. **Appearance** – must be acceptable within the working environment

Special Circumstances:**Essential**

1. Willing to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith in terms of the General Assembly's formula;
“I believe the Westminster Confession of Faith, as described in the Code (Chapter 1, Pars 12–14), to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and as such I subscribe it as the confession of my faith”
2. In full sympathy with the doctrinal position and ethos of the PCI and willing “loyally to implement” all decisions of the Courts of the Church
3. Available for irregular working hours, travel throughout Ireland and on occasions in the UK and beyond
4. Access to a car for work purposes

Desirable

1. Full driving licence

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 2

Church Relations Report

1. “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it”, 1 Corinthians 12:27. As we serve Christ and share with courage and love the Good News we do so as a body, a family, a community of global and local disciples. Connected in prayer, praise, witness and service, may we proclaim together that Jesus is Lord, and may the Spirit of truth empower us to do this with integrity, vision, hope and joy.

General

2. Local churches continue to partner, serve and pray alongside other believers as the body of Christ, reaching out together with the Good News of Jesus in many varied ways.

Church Leaders Group

3. In late September, the Church Leaders Group engaged in a two-day visit to the European Institutions in Brussels, where they had many meetings, including with the Vice President of the European Parliament, Antonella Sberna and the Executive Vice President of the European Commission, Maroš Šefčovič. “The Irish Church Leaders sought to recognise the positive progress that had been made over the years following on from Brexit as well as communicating the ongoing concerns and challenges faced by many sectors and communities especially in Northern Ireland... [They] shared the wide range of perspectives within their communities and noted the strong level of engagement by the people they met with. They welcomed a sincere commitment from these key individuals to building positive relationships between the United Kingdom, Ireland and the European Union, while recognising the challenges and opportunities that remain especially in relation to Northern Ireland.” (Report Church Leaders Group ICC).

ICC (Irish Council of Churches) and IICM (Irish Inter-Church Meeting)

4. Having served faithfully and with energy, passion and insight from May 2022, and after being Programme Officer with ICC for five years previous to that, Dr Damien Jackson concluded his time as General Secretary of ICC at the end of December. Mr Mark Kernohan (member of the ICC Executive, Moravian Church) helpfully supported the work of ICC as an Interim General Secretary. Following the advertisement of the position and a rigorous process of interviewing of applicants, Rev Karen Campbell has been appointed General Secretary. We congratulate her and pray for her in this important service to our Lord and to his church on this island.

5. The work of the Good Relations officer (Rev Karen Campbell, until March 2025) has continued under the following strands: Anti-Racism work, Tackling Paramilitarism, Legacy and working with Victims and Survivors, amongst other related initiatives. The church handbook, 'From Every Nation' continues to be circulated and training given related to it, and an initiative called 'Welcome to the Table', where honest dialogue provides a space where sensitive issues, including racism, can be explored, is proving helpful. Meetings continue to take place following on from 'Considering Grace', with consultations and material being written in the form of psalms of lament.

A watching brief continues observing the themes that influence the continuance of paramilitarism in certain areas. Some challenges in this regard are connected to the area of poverty, including "ghettoized areas that have been left behind", "educational underachievement on the loyalist protestant side", "trauma [which] has been an ongoing legacy of the conflict resulting in high incidences of depression and drug dependency", "a cultural alienation within the loyalist areas of Belfast which feeds victimhood and separation" and "a growing sense of needing to defend loyalist territory." "Trauma training for clergy as well as encouraging discussions around tackling poverty and finding ways to celebrate cultural diversity need to be ongoing." (Report for ICC, by Rev Karen Campbell)

Rev Campbell's report continues with an update from the legacy working group which met with Niall Haughey from the Northern Ireland office in November, and follows the introduction of primary legislation, which will implement the commitment to restore inquests, amend the disclosure regime and see the strengthening of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery. "The legacy group will continue to watch the progress of the ICRIR closely and maintain contact with the commission as well as others closely involved." (Report for ICC, Rev Karen Campbell)

6. Bishop Sarah Groves (Moravian Church) was installed as President of ICC in April 2024. The Very Rev Dr Charles McMullen (PCI) was installed as Vice- President and will be installed as President in April 2026. We pray for them, as they serve our Lord in these busy roles.
7. ICC has completed the sale of premises of 48 Elmwood Avenue and the offices have currently moved into rented premises at St Anne's Cathedral, while other premises are being sought.
8. The IICM (Irish Inter Church Meeting) conference took place in November 2024, looking at the theme of 'Finding the Face of God in One Another'. Before the gathering, it was noted that "considering the fracturing dynamics in contemporary society in Ireland today, it is apparent that reconciliation and healing are desperately needed" and that it is important that "our reflections be founded on robust theological reflection [so to] underpin dialogue and contemplation on the what and the how of our response to current realities" (IICM draft Programme, 2024). Dr Kevin Hargaden

(Elder PCI and Director and Social Theologian, Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice), amongst other speakers and panelists aided the delegates in their reflection and discussions.

9. An ICC Executive Retreat in February was facilitated by the Rev Ruth Patterson (PCI), on the theme ‘A Pilgrimage to Unity’ and this was indeed a blessing.

Other Fellowship Links

10. Links between PCI and EPC (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, USA) continue to be built.
11. In November 2024, a fraternal meeting for fellowship took place with representatives from the Church in Ireland and PCI and a helpful time of sharing took place.

REV H.M. FREEBURN, Convener

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 3

Ministers without charge and licentiates no longer serving in assistantships under par 219a of the code

1. Each year presbyteries are required to complete returns regarding ministers without charge and licentiates no longer serving in assistantships. The documentation about this was previously dealt with by the Reception of Ministers and Licensates Committee under the Council for Training in Ministry. However, at the General Assembly 2022, it was agreed that this would now be carried out by the General Assembly Advisory Committee, under the General Council (General Assembly Reports 2022, p262).

Requirements for retention

2. Code Par 219(4)(b) states:
The Presbytery shall seek authorisation annually through the General Council, or its appropriate committee, for those it wishes to retain on the Church's current records as recognised licentiates or ministers without charge. The Council shall consider such requests and ask the Assembly to resolve on its recommendations.
3. Code Par 219(4)(c) states:
It shall be a condition for retention that they report regularly to Presbytery as required, not less than annually, on their life and work, especially involvement in congregational life and Church work, in preaching, administration of the sacraments and conduct of marriages, and on whether they have actively been seeking a call.
4. The General Assembly Advisory Committee has considered the returns from presbyteries and brought the following recommendations to the General Council, for reporting to the General Assembly.

ARDS	<p>Rev A. Ditty to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev C.D. Mawhinney to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev L-A. Wilson to be retained as minister without charge</p>
ARMAGH	<p>Rev J.W.P. McConnell to be retained as minister without charge</p>
BALLYMENA	<p>Rev D.A. McMillan to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev Matthew D. Boyd to be retained as minister without charge</p>
NORTH BELFAST	<p>Rev Dr L.E. Carroll to be retained as minister charge</p> <p>Rev K. Patterson to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev W.A. Shaw to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev W.M. Smyth to be retained as minister without charge (retired)</p>
SOUTH BELFAST	<p>Rev J. Burnett to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev C. Herron to be retained as minister without charge</p>
EAST BELFAST	<p>Rev J.M. Casement to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev W.G. Hamilton to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev W.J. Harshaw to be retained as minister without charge (retired)</p> <p>Rev Dr D.J. Montgomery to be retained as minister without charge</p> <p>Rev Dr M.J. Welsh to be retained as minister without charge</p>
CARRICKFERGUS	<p>Rev T.N. Bingham to be retained as minister without charge</p>
COLERAINE AND LIMAVADY	<p>Rev Dr R.A. Kane to be retained as minister without charge</p>

DERRY AND DONEGAL	Rev J.L. Blair to be retained as minister without charge Rev S.R. Richmond to be retained as minister without charge
DOWN	Rev Dr B.C.G. Black to be retained as minister without charge Rev R.C. Patton to be retained as minister without charge
DROMORE	Rev S.W. Moore to be retained as minister without charge
DUBLIN AND MUNSTER	Rev Dr C. Dickson to be retained as minister without charge
IVEAGH	Rev P.G. Cleland to be retained as minister without charge
MONAGHAN	Rev D.J.M. Boyle to be retained as minister without charge Rev D. Clarke to be retained as minister without charge
NEWRY	Rev B.A. Wilson to be retained as minister without charge
ROUTE	Rev P. Douglas to be retained as minister without charge
TEMPLEPATRICK	Rev K. Campbell to be retained as minister without charge Rev D. Paul to be retained as minister without charge Rev J.L. Tosh to be retained as minister without charge
TYRONE	Rev W.I. Ferris to be retained as minister without charge

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 4

Task Group on the admission to baptism of children of unmarried parents

1. The 2024 General Assembly received a memorial from two members of the Monaghan Presbytery, the Revs John Hanson and Alan McQuade, as follows:

“That there is a lack of consistency in the approach taken by Kirk Sessions regarding the admission to baptism of the children of unmarried parents.

That there is a lack of credibility in the profession of faith of unmarried parents when they state in the baptismal vows that Jesus Christ is their Saviour from sin and Lord of their lives, that they are committed to living as followers of Jesus Christ, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit and that they are willing to provide a Christian home and bring up their child in the worship and teaching of the church.

That the practice of the baptism of children be consistent with the Order of Service of Marriage in which it is stated that marriage is the place for the highest expression of love between a man and a woman and marriage is the place for the ordering of family life, where children may enjoy the security of love and heritage of faith.

That the prohibition on the baptism of the children of a same sex couple be extended to include the children of a heterosexual couple who are not married.

Memorialists, therefore, pray your Venerable Assembly to ask the General Council to set up a task group to examine the issue and report back.”

2. The Memorial was transmitted by the Monaghan Presbytery, with the recommendation that its prayer be not granted.
3. However, the General Assembly accepted that the prayer of the Memorial be granted.
4. A General Council Task Group to examine the issue and report back was appointed as follows:

Very Rev Dr David Bruce (Chair), Rev Gordon Best (Convener), Dr Brian Craig, Rev Alan Dickey, Mr Allen Foster, Rev Trevor Gribben (Clerk of Assembly), Dr Annette Harte, Rev Graeme Kennedy, Rev Kathryn Viner.

5. The Task Group met three times: on 19 December 2024, 27 January 2025 and 19 February 2025. In the course of its work, the Task Group met with the memorialists, and with the Acting Moderator and Clerk of the Monaghan Presbytery.

6. The Task Group notes the following:
 - (a) The memorialists refer to the specific issue of unmarried parents presenting their children for baptism. The question of single parents seeking baptism for their children was not referenced in the Memorial, nor considered by the Task Group.
 - (b) The Code (Para.39(2)) states, '*Sacramental discipline is the responsibility of the Kirk Session; so, it is desirable (though not necessary, except in difficult cases) that the Session should be informed that a baptism is to take place and that the elder for the district should visit the home. Refusal is also the prerogative of the Session.*'
 - (c) The 2021 General Assembly agreed on three types of General Assembly decisions, which have now been written into the Revised Code.
 - (i) Decisions that are taken in the form of Guidance, that is good advice which should be taken into consideration.
 - (ii) Decisions that are in the form of **Guidelines**, that should be followed in all but exceptional cases, the exception having to be justified to a superior court if required.
 - (iii) Decisions that are **Regulations** which are binding and must be followed. These include both provisions inserted into the Code and other binding decisions adopted by Assembly Resolution.
 - (d) While the key provision of Code (Para. 39(2)) is a **regulation**, stating that Kirk Sessions have discretion to approve or refuse admission to the sacrament of baptism, it also contains **guidance** for Kirk Sessions on the matter.
 - (e) The chief concern expressed in the Memorial is that where there is a lack of consistency in the approach taken by Kirk Sessions regarding the admission to baptism of the children of unmarried couples – this may pose a threat to the unity of the Church, both within congregations, presbyteries and across the denomination.
7. The General Council re-affirms the Church's teaching and standards on baptism, that parents presenting their children for baptism should be able to demonstrate a credible profession of faith. The Council further notes that this matter should be handled with great care and sensitivity, given the wide range of complex pastoral situations which arise within congregations, relating to the matter of baptism. For instance, some Kirk Sessions offer an Act of Thanksgiving to couples who are unable to take baptismal vows.
8. It is the view of the Council that some additional guidelines to Kirk Sessions be provided in support of the provisions of Code 39(2). The framing of such Guidelines would assist in:
 - (a) Re-affirming the Church's clear position regarding admission to baptism of the children of unmarried couples, without the force of a more rigid regulation in its pastoral application.

- (b) allowing Kirk Sessions to retain discretion on admission to baptism, thus enabling them to exercise a degree of pastoral flexibility and sensitivity when exceptional circumstances arise, which they may be required to justify to a superior court.
9. The General Council makes the following recommendations to the General Assembly:

That Guidelines be provided to Kirk Sessions regarding the admission to baptism of the children of unmarried couples, as follows:

- (a) Sacramental discipline remains the responsibility of the Kirk Session, (Code Par 39(2)). In all difficult or complex cases of requests for baptism, the minister should bring the matter before the Kirk Session for consideration and decision.
- (b) The children of unmarried couples should normally not be baptised, unless there are clear exceptional pastoral circumstances which the Kirk Session can justify to a superior court, if required.
- (c) Pastoral sensitivity should always be shown while engaging with unmarried couples seeking baptism for their children, with a view to encouraging them towards Christian marriage.

GORDON BEST, Convener

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 5

Affirmation of Fraternal and Confessional Relations between the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (USA)

Compelled by the clear teaching of Scripture that the body of Christ acts for his glory in its mutual support and cooperation, and acknowledging our common confessional heritage within the reformed tradition, the following is affirmed by the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, meeting in Belfast, Northern Ireland from 10–12 June 2025, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (USA) meeting in Detroit, Michigan, from 17–19 June 2025.

We each, through our various agencies and courts, will seek tangible ways to express our commonality of purpose in witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ. These expressions may include:

- Invitations for appointed representatives of each denomination from time to time, to attend and exchange fraternal greetings at meetings of their General Assemblies.
- Opportunities for ministers in training to benefit from exchange visits, and other means of educational cooperation, for the enrichment of their preparation for ordination and service.
- Consultation between office-holders, and practical cooperation where appropriate, on matters of mutual concern in mission and ministry, including (but not limited to) local mission, overseas partnerships, public policy and the wider mission of the Church of Christ.
- The mutual sharing of published resources and research, sharing models of best practice and other insights for the enhancement of the life and witness of our churches.
- Possibilities for short-term mission-team visits and other similar ventures to be mutually supported, as appropriate.
- Encouragement of bi-lateral bonds of fellowship between congregations of both denominations, including prayerful and relational support, pulpit exchanges and visits.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APPENDIX 6

Correspondence and conversations with representatives of Christian Aid

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 On 25 August 2024, an article was published in the Belfast Newsletter, referring to the production by Christian Aid and others, of a paper entitled “Queering the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda – a practice-based toolkit”.
- 1.2 The production of the paper involved input from Christian Aid, funded by The British Academy, and with a research and authoring team led by Dr Jamie J Hagan, Lecturer in International Relations at Queen’s University, Belfast, and the founder of the Centre for Gender and Politics. The paper was published on the Christian Aid and QUB websites.
- 1.3 The publication and contents of the paper raised concerns at Presbytery level, and the matter was raised formally with the Clerk of Assembly by the Ballymena and Route presbyteries.
- 1.4 The General Council considered the issue at its meeting on 15 November 2024 and, having received an introductory report from the General Assembly Advisory Committee, resolved:
 - (a) The General Council fully affirms that in a conflict situation the dignity of all people must be protected.
 - (b) The General Council expresses deep concern and regret that a document was published and publicised by Christian Aid which promoted a theological position very significantly at odds with the stated position of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, a longstanding Sponsoring Church of Christian Aid, leading to a loss of confidence both in the judgement of some staff in Christian Aid and in the governance/management systems of the organisation as a whole.
 - (c) The General Council instruct the Clerk of Assembly, General Council Convener and Global Mission Secretary to engage directly with Christian Aid GB on behalf of PCI raising the issues in points (a) and (b) above and reporting back to the General Council.

2. Outcomes following the November 2024 meeting of the General Council

- 2.1 In line with resolution (iii) above, the Clerk of Assembly wrote on 6 December 2024 to the CEO of Christian Aid GB expressing the concerns of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and requested (see

Appendix 6a) an in-person meeting. This meeting took place in Holywood, on Saturday 18 January with Mr Patrick Watt (CEO Christian Aid GB), Bishop Sarah Mullally (Christian Aid GB Board Chair) and Mrs Rosamond Bennett (CEO, Christian Aid Ireland). PCI was represented by the Clerk, the General Council Convener and the Global Mission Secretary.

- 2.2 The meeting itself engaged openly with the areas of concern raised by both the Presbyteries and the General Council. It referenced a letter written to the Clerk on 24 September 2024 by the office bearers of Christian Aid Ireland (see Appendix 6b) which made the following key assertions:
 - 2.2.1 Christian Aid Ireland does not adopt any policy or agenda on issues of gender identity and human sexuality
 - 2.2.2 The paper “*Queering the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda – a practice-based toolkit*”, was not adopted, circulated or promoted by Christian Aid Ireland, and has been removed from the Christian Aid website.
- 2.3 A written response from Christian Aid GB was requested. A letter of response from Mr Patrick Watt was received dated 27 January 2025 (see Appendix 6c), and a meeting to consider it was held by the PCI representatives. The key points emerging from Mr Watt’s response are as follows:
 - 2.3.1 Christian Aid is committed to working with marginalised groups, including LGBT people, where they face structural barriers to development. Christian Aid acknowledges a range of views among its Sponsoring Churches, supporters and staff on these matters, some of whom are from within the LGBT community.
 - 2.3.2 It is clear that Christian Aid does have a “position” on gender, based on its own paper published in 2017 “Strategy on Gender Justice” and a report published in 2014 “Of the Same Flesh: Exploring a theology of gender”. This position has led to the formation of a strategy which recognises that “there are transgender and sexual minorities who are excluded and disadvantaged” and this is reflected in the choice of partners for support.
 - 2.3.3 Notwithstanding the above point, Mr Watt’s letter affirms the assertion made by Christian Aid Ireland that “no policy or agenda on issues of gender identity and human sexuality” exists.
 - 2.3.4. A number of positive reassurances were given which are noted, about changes to the internal sign-off arrangements for the publication of “products for external use” and how it is considered to be “...critically important that our staff, during recruitment and induction, understand and are in sympathy with our identity”.

3. Matters referred to the General Council

- 3.1 The General Council has already stated its “deep concern and regret that a document was published and publicised by Christian Aid which promoted a theological position very significantly at odds with the stated position of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland”.
- 3.2 How should the arrangement between PCI and Christian Aid as a development partner be taken forward?
 - 3.2.1 The General Council could recommend to the General Assembly that PCI break its link with Christian Aid. While having the benefit of clarity, this approach raises a number of potential issues, if actioned immediately.
 - 3.2.2 Given that plans for the promotion of the 2025 World Development Appeal are currently well advanced, the General Council could recommend to the General Assembly that, as an interim measure for 2025, congregations be permitted, if they so desire, to specify which development partner their donation to the World Development Appeal be sent, and that no differences in the amounts allocated be “made up” centrally. It is thought that this approach is deliverable between the Council for Global Mission and the Financial Secretary’s Department.
 - 3.2.3 Given that the wider question of ‘Mission and Development’ is under active consideration by the Structures and Resources Review Panel, the question of support for Christian Aid and other development agencies could be referred to that Panel as part of its discussions, and a final decision on PCI’s policy on support for development be deferred until the full report is before the church.

4. Suggested Draft Resolutions to the General Council:

- (a) That the General Council recommends to the General Assembly that, as an interim measure for the 2025 World Development Appeal, a change is made to current practice, to allow congregations, if they so desire, to specify to which development agency (Christian Aid or Tear Fund) their donation be sent, and that no differences in the amounts allocated between agencies be “made up” centrally.
- (b) That the contents of this summary report be forwarded to the Structures and Resources Review Panel to inform the active discussions on ‘Mission and Development’ currently being undertaken.

APPENDIX 6(A)

Letter to Christian Aid GB

Mr Patrick Watt,
Chief Executive,
Christian Aid
(by e-mail)

Friday 6th December 2024

Dear Patrick,

I write to you as General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), the largest Protestant Church in Northern Ireland and a Sponsoring Church of Christian Aid. As you may well be aware the production, publication and promotion of a report/booklet entitled 'Queering the women, peace and security agenda' has caused a great deal of concern among leaders and members of PCI. An article published on 25th August 2024 in one of Northern Ireland's main papers, the Belfast Newsletter, appeared to link this fairly radical report/booklet directly to Christian Aid. The following is a link to the Newsletter article, of which no doubt you are already aware: *Christian Aid and Queen's University Belfast produce 56-page booklet on 'queering the peace agenda' (newsletter.co.uk)*

Initial discussions took place between Rev Uel Marrs (PCI Global Mission Secretary and a member of the Christian Aid (Ireland) Board), and the Chair of Christian Aid (Ireland), the Rev Dr Liz Hughes. A number of important clarifications were received verbally and a letter was received from the Board of Christian Aid (Ireland). The matter was then addressed at a meeting of one of the senior committees of our denomination, at which it was apparent that the document concerned had been published and publicized by Christian Aid. It was also apparent that the document promoted a theological position that is very significantly at odds with the stated position of PCI, a longstanding Sponsoring Church of Christian Aid. It was noted that while this was published by 'Christian Aid GB', not by 'Christian Aid Ireland', nonetheless in the minds of most people here there is simply 'Christian Aid'.

At the autumn meeting of PCI's General Council, the most senior body outside of annual meeting of our General Assembly, a report was received and a full discussion took place. The Council recognized that this matter had caused significant and potentially lasting damage to the relationship PCI has with Christian Aid. Therefore, the General Council passed three specific related resolutions, as follows:

- (i) The General Council fully affirms that in a conflict situation the dignity of all people must be protected.

- (ii) The General Council expresses deep concern and regret that a document was published and publicized by Christian Aid which promoted a theological position very significantly at odds with the stated position of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, a longstanding Sponsoring Church of Christian Aid, leading to a loss of confidence both in the judgement of some staff in Christian Aid and in the governance/management systems of the organization as a whole.

The General Council instruct the Clerk of Assembly, General Council Convener and Global Mission Secretary to engage directly with Christian Aid GB on behalf of PCI raising the issues in points (i) and (ii) above and reporting back to the General Council.

I would appreciate it if you could get in touch to enable us to agree mutually suitable arrangements to meet and discuss this matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trevor D Gribben', written in a cursive style.

Trevor D Gribben (Rev)

APPENDIX 6 (B)

Letter from Christian Aid Ireland

To: The Clerk of the General Assembly

24th September 2024

Dear Trevor,

RE: REQUEST FROM CHRISTIAN AID IRELAND BOARD

As you will be aware, following the publication of an article in the *Newsletter* on 25th August, Christian Aid Ireland has received a significant number of expressions of concern from among our supporters in the Presbyterian Church. In response, an emergency meeting of the Board took place on Friday 20th September.

Board members are anxious, first and foremost, to communicate to our supporters that their concerns have been heard and are being taken seriously. Secondly, we wish to offer clarification and reassurance that there has been no change to our practice of not adopting any policy or agenda on issues of gender identity and human sexuality in the work of Christian Aid Ireland, and the wider Christian Aid family. The guiding principle for our work in all the situations and contexts where we provide humanitarian and development support remains the respect for the worth and dignity of every human person, as made in the image and likeness of God, without distinction or exception.

Given that the concerns expressed are shared by a significant number of Presbyterian congregations the Board would appreciate your support and guidance in communicating this reassurance and clarification.

A summary of the Board discussions on this theme is provided below. This can be shared where relevant and helpful.

- The presentation, title and media coverage of this research report give the misleading impression that this is a formal policy document of Christian Aid, reflecting a particular ‘agenda’ to be promoted in Christian Aid’s work. The Board understands why this would cause concern among supporters as it appears to represent a change from Christian Aid’s well-founded practice of not adopting any policy or agenda on issues of gender identity and human sexuality. Christian Aid recognises and respects the diversity of views that exists among our sponsoring churches. The guiding principle for our work in all the situations and contexts where we provide humanitarian and development support remains the respect for the worth and dignity of every human person, as made in the image and likeness of God, without distinction or exception. Our approach is clearly set out in *Why Christian Aid Ireland* published in 2023. *Why Christian Aid Ireland* | *Christian Aid Ireland*

- This research report, which was funded by the British Academy, and in which Christian Aid Britain and Ireland was one of a number of contributing partners, aimed to identify particular vulnerabilities and needs of people who may experience additional risk in situations of conflict for reasons of gender and sexuality and offer recommendations on how these people might best be protected and assisted. It is deeply regrettable that this was not conveyed effectively in the title and presentation of the report.
- The report was not adopted, circulated or promoted by Christian Aid Ireland.
- In response to the concerns raised the Board and staff have been engaging with those who have contacted us directly, communicating a willingness to listen and take action. We have shared the concerns raised with the leadership of Christian Aid Britain and Ireland and, in response, the report has been removed from the website. We have been explaining our position to supporters and exploring with them how best to address their concerns.
- Given that a number of Presbyterian congregations have contacted us, it would be important to engage in dialogue with PCI leadership on this issue.
- Next year will mark the 80th anniversary of the establishment of Christian Aid in response to the collective commitment of the Christian churches in the UK and Ireland to respond to the humanitarian catastrophe of war and violence in a spirit of Christian compassion, solidarity and love of neighbour. Our relationship to our sponsoring churches is the driving force for the work that we do, and the generosity of our supporters makes that work possible. PCI have stood in partnership in prayer and financial support for those most affected during periods of emergency and humanitarian need, bringing dignity and hope back to communities. These have included Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, the Nepal Earthquake, and the Appeals for Yemen, Cyclone Idai, and Ukraine. The support of PCI has enabled Christian Aid to reach many hundreds of thousands of people facing the most desperate of situations. A further vital contribution of this partnership has been the long-term support to communities whose suffering and struggles are not making the headlines. The PCI World Development Appeal has in the last 10 years alone extended their partnership, prayerful support and funding to Christian partner agencies in more than 19 countries spanning across the world. We are committed to doing all we can to strengthen and deepen these working relationships so that this life-giving work of hope can continue.

We would be grateful to receive any feedback and/or questions on this and any advice would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Liz Hughes (Chair) Nicola Brady (Vice-Chair) Rosamond Bennett (CEO)

APPENDIX 6 (C)

Letter from Christian Aid GbB

The Rev Trevor D Gribben
Clerk of the General Assembly
Assembly Buildings
2-10 Fisherwick Place
Belfast BT1 6DW

27 January 2025

Dear Trevor,

Thank you for your letter dated December 6th 2024, sent in your capacity as General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI). Following what I thought was a constructive and open meeting at Holywood on Saturday, January 18th, involving the two of us, together with David Bruce and Uel Marrs, and Rosamond Bennett, CEO of Christian Aid Ireland and Sarah Mullally, Christian Aid's chair, I wanted to follow up in writing on the specific concerns raised by PCI.

As Bishop Sarah said when we met, we recognise the importance for PCI of the issues that were raised, which also matter for us, as the development and humanitarian agency of the British and Irish churches. I appreciate the opportunity we had to discuss this with you, David, and Uel face-to-face, and the spirit in which the meeting was held. Christian Aid deeply values our relationship with PCI, and the faithful gifts, prayers, and actions of church members that have helped to sustain our work over the last 80 years.

Firstly, I want to welcome the recognition that in conflict settings the dignity of all people must be protected, and that acts of violence against any person or group of people on the grounds of any identity or characteristic, including sexual orientation or gender, are fundamentally wrong. Our commitment to working with people of all faiths and beliefs, and of all backgrounds, is rooted in Christ's commandment to love our neighbour. It also reflects humanitarian principles of universality and impartiality: doing effective development and humanitarian work requires us to meet people where they are, and to work with a diverse set of partners.

Inevitably, as an organisation that works through partnerships, there will be areas where we align with our partners and therefore on which we choose to collaborate, and areas where we work separately from each other. It is important that Christian Aid is always clear about which priorities we share with a partner, and which parts of their work (and our

work) are not shared. We have not always been as clear about this as we could or should be. We are currently putting in place a new governance group, led by relevant directors, that will ensure greater coherence and consistency in our partnerships.

Christian Aid's work with LGBT people is not a new departure, and grew out of our work on HIV and AIDS in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and our peacebuilding experience. Our first partnership with a LGBT organisation began in Honduras in 2007, and while it is a relatively small element of our work on gender-based violence, it is consistent with the approach Christian Aid takes more broadly to working with people who face structural barriers to development, including women and girls, indigenous people, ethnic minorities, Dalits, and refugees and migrants. Christian Aid's 2019-2026 strategy, *Standing Together*, sets out this approach, as does Christian Aid Ireland's organisational strategy.

I recognise the sensitivity and complexity of issues of gender and sexuality, within and between our sponsoring churches, and in the varied social, religious, and legal settings in which Christian Aid works. Our supporters and staff legitimately hold a range of deeply held views on these issues, and some of them are personally affected as members of the LGBT community.

Given this sensitivity and complexity, we seek to limit the position we take on gender to what is relevant and appropriate for a Christian development and humanitarian organisation supported by churches with a variety of theological and ethical standpoints. That position is set out in our 2017 strategy on gender justice, which built on our 2014 report, *'Of the Same Flesh: exploring a theology of gender'*. Our strategy commits us to promoting right relationship between all people, irrespective of gender, and sees this both as a goal in its own right, and an important means to wider development outcomes.

In our strategy, we describe the theological grounding for our work in this area, and recognise that while our work on gender justice primarily focuses on equality between men and boys and women and girls, there are transgender people and sexual minorities who are also excluded and disadvantaged, and that we need an inclusive approach where – in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals – 'no one is left behind'.

As was stated in the letter from Christian Aid Ireland's chair and CEO to you, on September 24th 2024, there has been no change to our practice of not adopting any policy or agenda on issues of gender identity and human sexuality in the work of Christian Aid. Since I reviewed and fed into the letter before it was sent, I can assure you that this is true of the wider Christian Aid family.

We have listened to the concerns raised in your letter about governance and management, in relation to the toolkit that was jointly produced in 2023 by Queen's University Belfast, Colombia Diversa, and Christian Aid. I want to set out three areas where we have identified a need for changes, in light of the issues raised by PCI. Firstly, on particularly sensitive and complex issues we need to have senior oversight in commissioning and sign off of products for external use – including reports, briefings, toolkits,

media statements and campaign materials – to ensure consistency with existing policy and strategy. This is especially important where materials are being produced in partnership with other organisations. We are strengthening our sign off protocols, and their implementation, in line with this approach. Where a corporate decision is taken to develop new policy, this is overseen by the CEO with the relevant directors, and where appropriate also involves trustees. As a Christian organisation this should be grounded in theological reflection.

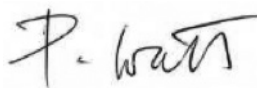
Secondly, Christian Aid and Christian Aid Ireland need to be consistent and coherent in how our work is communicated to supporters, churches, and the wider public, including in the area of gender and sexuality. While our two organisations are legally separate, we share a programme infrastructure, brand, and relationship with the churches, and need to ensure that the topline communication of our work on gender is clear, and is well articulated in key strategic documents, in a way that reflects our faith identity and is aligned with our existing strategy. Communications leads in Christian Aid and Christian Aid Ireland are currently reviewing how this work is communicated, to ensure consistency between our two organisations. This work is being overseen by me and Rosamond Bennett.

Finally, it is critically important that our staff, during recruitment and induction, understand and are in sympathy with our Christian identity. This includes an effective onboarding about our governance, our programme approach, our workplace policies on diversity and inclusion, and the role that theological reflection plays in the formulation and articulation of our work. As we undergo significant changes to our organisational model in 2025, and look to strengthen our church-based and wider faith-based partnerships, we will be paying particular attention to strengthening our organisational culture in ways that reflect our values of dignity, equality, justice, and love.

I hope that this letter is helpful in responding to the concerns that have been raised. I want to thank you again for the time we spent together earlier this month, to work through the points in your letter, and to better understand our respective contexts.

Please do not hesitate to come back to me if you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Watt', written in a cursive style.

Patrick Watt (CEO, Christian Aid)

COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

Draft Communications Strategy for the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and its Councils

1. Communications Strategy Review Group reported to the 2023 General Assembly that: “*The Head of Communications would help to further define and implement and continuously review PCIS Communications strategy.*”

This paper was presented to the General Council giving an update on progress of this work and to propose a Communications Strategy for 2025/26.

2. Scope of work

- (a) The Head of Communications (HoC) was tasked with defining and creating a Communications Strategy for the General Assembly and its Councils.
- (b) In carrying out this work out the HoC initially met with all Council Secretaries, Council Conveners and key staff, followed by all staff in Assembly Buildings
- (c) After these initial conversations a series of Presbytery engagements were organised where the needs and aspirations of ministers and the wider church views were sought and discussed. In addition, a number of meetings were held with young people, journalists and others interested in the communications provided by PCI.
- (d) In general terms, most of those viewed the communications from the General Assembly and its Councils positively but recognised that the onus was on ministers to disseminate messages to those who belong to the denomination. It was generally recognised that this was a suboptimal way of cascading information and there was a desire to increase our communications directly to members in the pews. In discussions about the *Presbyterian Herald* and *Inspire* magazines it was recognised that the demographics of those taking the magazines were in the older age range. To make the magazines more widely accessible, greater promotion of digital formats and a brand refresh were suggested.
- (e) In relation to the social media profiles and platforms managed through the Communications Department and the Councils, again the views expressed were generally positive, but a greater coordination of messages and a wider variety of messaging was encouraged
- (f) Inevitably, in all discussions, the current website and the issues surrounding it were raised; it is good to report that these are being addressed in a separate but parallel piece of work.

- (g) The feedback from these discussions, plus the metrics available from the social media channels, the podcast and video platforms controlled by the Communications Department, have been used to evaluate the reach, effectiveness and engagement of these channels.

3. Outcome

- (a) Taking all the comments and information gathered from these meetings and in discussion with colleagues both in the Communications Department and other Councils, the Head of Communications has drawn up a detailed Communications Strategy. (This is available by following the link <https://bit.ly/DraftCommsStrategy>, with the Recommendations included in Appendix A of this Report.)
- (b) This document outlines the strategies and approaches that, should they be adopted, will help create a more coordinated and focused approach to messaging and communications. The success of this strategy will bring a joined-up/cross council approach to communications, giving each Council appropriate freedom within an agreed framework. This strategy is focused on delivering clear, accurate and timely communications both to those within PCI, particularly to those within congregations and to the wider public including those in the wider public arena.

MARK NEALE, Head of Communications

COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

APPENDIX A

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Review and consolidate the Press and Media Policy to include guidelines on media training and guidance for spokespersons.
2. Review and re-issue of the PCI Style Guide.
3. Review and re-issue of the PCI Branding Guidelines.
4. Consolidate relevant policies into a single Podcast/Video Coordination Policy to include plans for cyclical events including United Appeal/ World Development Appeal/ General Assembly etc.
5. Creation of a single denomination-wide subscription email.
6. Revise and develop the Social Media Policy, including updating of usage/ engagement policy.
7. Begin work on a *Presbyterian Herald* redesign.
8. Survey of elders regarding access to the *Presbyterian Herald*, and consideration of making the *Presbyterian Herald* available online to each elder.
9. Greater promotion of the online magazine.
10. Revise and update the Website Policy to coincide with the launch of the new website, the policy to include details of website governance.
11. Retain the Website Task Group until the new website is fully bedded in.
12. Councils to create individual communications plans for the work and activity of their Council.
13. Project plans to be created for each key activity to include communications.
14. Communications Department to create and maintain a cross-Council activity calendar.
15. A quarterly communication coordinating group to be set up cross-departmentally.
16. Creation of an engagement plan across all presbyteries to include the identification of congregational communications representatives.
17. Creation of a specific communications plan for CSW to incorporate plans and communication strategies for their facilities and programmes.
18. Revise and update the Communications Crisis Management Plan to include a Communications Crisis Management Plan for key staff.
19. Creation of an Internal Communications Plan, to include staff briefings, events and newsletters.
20. Creation of a Communications Panel under the General Council, with the Head of Communications as Secretary and having in its membership those with expertise in communications.

PCI WEBSITE TASK GROUP

Following the Communications Strategy Review Group report to the 2023 General Assembly, the Website Development Group was set up to progress the recommendations on developing a new PCI website.

The task group consisted of: Mark Neale (Convener) Very Rev Dr David Bruce, Rev Ben Preston, Rev Niall Lockhart, Gareth Dunlop (Technical Advisor), Peter Shields, James McCormick and Ruth Dalzell.

1. Scope of work

The website task group to progress the following digital priorities:

- (a) Redevelopment of the PCI website at <https://presbyterianireland.org/>
- (b) Explore methods of cost-saving by reduction in reliance on third-party systems (or using more cost-effective third-party systems) in areas such as event management and online payments
- (c) Deployment of a private document area, protected behind username and password, to help with the efficient running of congregational, presbytery and Assembly Buildings business, containing documents such as meeting agendas, meeting minutes, manse regulations and other processes and protocols
- (d) Implementing a new approach to web content, to ensure the new website remains fresh and vibrant long into the future

2. Redevelopment of the PCI website

Following the development of a website specification by the task group's Technical Advisor (Gareth Dunlop), a long list of potential website development agencies was drawn up.

From this initial long-list, 13 agencies were invited to express interest by 8 November. From this group, those who expressed an interest received tender documentation on 19 November.

Tender proposals were received from seven agencies ahead of the deadline of 6 December. Following a shortlisting process, five were deemed suitable to take to the next stage of formal presentation.

On 7 January 2025, formal presentations were made by four agencies; one shortlisted agency having withdrawn in advance.

Across both written submission and formal presentation, Eyekiller was selected as the preferred agency and, after a period of final clarifications and negotiations, Eyekiller was formally appointed to deliver the website design and development project.

Since early February, Eyekiller, the Technical Advisor and staff from the Communications Department have worked, at pace, to create and approve the wireframes for the new website. These were initially tested via a user survey which received a very positive response.

The wireframes are currently being finalised and, once complete, the design phase will commence.

3. Cost Saving on third-party systems

Within the technical solutions offered by Eyekiller, proposals are being considered as to how to most effectively marry the needs of PCI with the most appropriate solutions available.

Work is ongoing to consider and evaluate these, including consideration of bespoke solutions, as well as seeking to use cost effect third party systems where appropriate.

Further work needs to be done to secure the most cost-effective solutions and proposals will be made to the Task Group as solutions become available.

4. Private document area

This piece of work was scheduled to commence this month but, due to the focus on the current phase of work, this is now being rescheduled, with the planning being done in parallel with the design phase; the private document area being done immediately after the launch of the site. As previously reported, with much of the technical infrastructure in place through PCI's Microsoft technology tenancy, including Sharepoint, the definition of material to be made available and the security around this aspect of the project needs careful consideration. This will be done in conjunction with the IT department and the relevant Council Secretaries and staff.

5. A new approach to content

As a key element of the tendering process, all agencies were encouraged to engage with the Task Group's vision of improving the website experience via the greater emphasis on storytelling and softening user journeys. In October Gareth Dunlop created an editorial roadmap document which is helpful in this process. This document addresses the following areas:

- Seasonality and the rhythm of the church
- Content formats and audiences
- Navigation and user journeys
- Categorisation and findability of content
- Archiving
- Site search
- Search engine optimisation
- Distribution of responsibility across the organisation
- Workflow and governance

Eyekiller have embraced this approach in the early design stages and are creating support material and training packages to enable and enhance the capabilities of internal staff to provide emotionally and spiritually engaging information. In addition, the Communications Department is working with Councils and Council Secretaries to develop the material and resources available through the website.

Short term additional support in this area has been sought and the development of content, including transfer of material remains on track.

6. Conclusion.

The website development project is continuing at pace and will be delivered with an anticipated launch in mid-summer 2025.

MARK NEALE, Convener

GUYSMERE PANEL

1. Introduction

The remit which the General Assembly gave Guysmere Trust states:

“that the proposed redevelopment of Guysmere, as outlined in the Feasibility Study, be permitted to proceed to the next stage i.e. the capital project development (technical and funding) which allows the local promoting group sufficient time to work through all of the activities required to refine and define its preferred option, and to secure both planning consent and also the required capital funding to effectively deliver the project”.

2. In our 2023 Feasibility Study we looked at twelve precedent projects and learned a number of significant lessons. One of these is that it is very difficult for a youth centre to be financially sustainable. However, when a centre identifies a variety of interest groups, then financial sustainability can be achieved.

We have carefully refined a Development Proposal with three key elements each of which will generate income in addition to that brought in by church groups, youth groups, local organisations and others using the facilities in the new centre. The three elements which were outlined in full in last year’s report are:-

Element 1: Exploring Ulster’s Christian Heritage.

This will engage with the international Faith Tourism market particularly from N. America and will also meet the demand from churches and other faith groups in Ireland and the UK for a residential and conference centre on the North Coast which is suited to their requirements.

Element 2: Learning from C.S. Lewis: his Roots and Legacy.

C.S. Lewis spent his early years in Belfast and spent three formative holidays with his mother and brother in Castlerock. Today there is a global interest in his life, writings, theology and apologetics.

The Trust has entered an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with Union Theological College, Belfast, to develop a C.S. Lewis centre at Guysmere with a Scholar in Residence.

Element 3: Discovering the Ulster-Scots – their History, Faith and Culture.

The story of the Ulster-Scots people is an inspiring record of how their faith and culture has shaped Ireland and the New World. The Trust will engage with the international groups who want to visit the homeland of their ancestors and learn about their history, faith and culture.

In meetings with the MP for East Londonderry, local MLAs, Officials and Councillors of Causeway Coast and Glens Council, members of the north coast business community and local residents, our proposal has invariably been met with a positive response.

It is estimated that it will cost £300,000 to engage architects to prepare a full set of plans for the proposed centre and to secure planning consent (RIBA Stage 3) as required by our remit, thus bringing the project to the point where the construction phase can begin. Since we do not yet have such plans, we are not in a position to present the project to the public and need to raise this sum by approaching potential donors in private. To facilitate this process we have produced a promotional video and a ‘One-pager’ summary of the project which can be used to present our vision. We have also brought our website up to date and are currently raising the money required for this phase.

3. Course of Action:

- (a) Make arrangements for the implementation of the MOU with Union Theological College
- (b) Complete fundraising for the Planning and Development Phase
- (c) Undertake a design competition and then appoint an architect
- (d) Proceed with the design development stages leading to the preparation of the planning application along with the supporting information e.g. an environmental impact assessment
- (e) Procure the remainder of the integrated design team consisting of a quantity surveyor, civil, structural, mechanical and electrical engineers, environmental specialist etc. as necessary
- (f) Appoint a Project Development Manager and launch the fund-raising phase
- (g) The Impetus Group / Board of Directors has had nine meetings in the last 12 months.

JIM McCAUGHAN, Convener

DOCTRINE COMMITTEE

1. The Doctrine Committee was not required to meet during the last year.

MICHAEL McCLENAHAN, Convener

GENERAL COUNCIL SECTION 4

GUIDELINES REVIEW TASK GROUP

1. The Clerk of Assembly writes:
Since the outset of the Task Group’s deliberations its work has been based on the compilation of General Assembly Reports drawn up initially by the Rev Jim Stothers when he was Deputy Clerk of Assembly. This has been an invaluable resource and has made manageable what would otherwise have been a daunting task.
The ongoing work of the Task Group has relied upon the expertise of the Rev Jonathan Boyd, in the use of electronic tools to assist with categorising the historic reports of the General Assembly. It therefore made sense for Jonathan to be appointed as Convener of the Task Group going forward, in place of the Clerk of Assembly, and this was agreed by the General Council.
2. Following the 2023 General Assembly the task group was set up with the following remit:
To examine all existing General Assembly ‘guidelines/guidance’ (that are not currently referred to directly in the Republished Code) and report at the latest to the 2025 General Assembly as to whether each of these continue to be required (perhaps in an updated form) and, if so, whether they should be categorised as ‘regulations’, ‘guidelines’ or ‘guidance’, in line with the categories agreed by the 2021 General Assembly.
3. At the 2024 General Assembly the task group reported that it would not be practical to look at every decision of the General Assembly that predates the adoption of the categories of regulations, guidelines, and guidance, and that the task group was focusing on a collection of 173 reports and resolutions from 1972–2023 on subjects that members of the church had made enquiries about in recent years, with the aim of making them available online in a categorised, updated form.
4. Since the 2024 General Assembly the task group has met twice – on 7 February and 3 March 2025. The task group has added one category – that of a summary document collating useful information from other sources rather than a new decision by the General Assembly. It has agreed to take one of the following actions for each report: accept and publish it as it is; refer it to a committee or council for update; update it within the task group; remove it from the list of reports to be published if it is no longer relevant; or further discuss what needs to be done with it. Some reports contained recommendations which fell into a range of categories and the task group has had to use its judgement to determine which category

would be best to put these reports into. A report categorised as guidelines, for example, might contain recommendations that are mostly guidelines, but also contain some guidance or a regulation.

5. It was agreed that 79 reports should be removed from the list of reports to be published as they are largely redundant, leaving 94 reports that have been categorised. There is a list in Appendix 1 which is summarised in the following table:

	Accept and publish as it is	Refer to council or committee	Task group update	Total
Regulation	14	8	2	24
Guidelines	23	14	1	38
Guidance	24	2		26
Summary	4			4
Requires further discussion	1	1		2
Total	66	25	3	94

6. When a report is referred to a council or committee for update it will be for that group to decide on the most appropriate way to deal with the report, but there will be a brief note explaining why the task group has referred. Some examples of appropriate actions that councils and committees could decide to take are as follows:
- Update the language or change Code references to match the new Code.
 - Indicate that the report is no longer relevant as it has been superseded by more recent material
 - Determine that the content is out of date, but the subject is still relevant, so a new report will be produced.
7. For the 2025 General Assembly the task group has produced a categorised list of reports that have been reviewed (see Appendix 1) and PDFs of the contents of the relevant reports, which can be found using the following link <https://bit.ly/GuidelinesReviewDocuments2025>, so that the Assembly can easily review the work to date.

GUIDELINES REVIEW TASK GROUP APPENDIX 1

LIST OF 94 REPORTS

A. REGULATIONS (24)

Accept as is (14)

- Membership and people with intellectual disabilities [2023]
- The Way Forward if an annual meeting of the General Assembly cannot be held in-person [2022]
- The Way Forward if General Assembly Councils and Commissions cannot be held in-person [2022]
- The Way Forward if Presbytery meetings cannot be held in-person [2022]
- Vows for Full Membership and Baptism Task Group [2021]
- Making the General Assembly More Accessible Task Group [2021]
- Ministry Application Pathway Review [2019]
- Same-Sex Couples and the Sacraments [2018]
- Publishing Letters in The Herald Relating To Judicial Cases [2017]
- Ministers' Prolonged Disability Fund [2017]
- Ministers' Expenses [2017]
- Age Limit for Applicants for the Ordained Ministry [2010]
- Magee University College – College and Magee Management Committee [2001]
- Participation in the UK National Lottery [1995]

Refer to a council or committee (8)

Rules to be followed in the Reception of Ministers and Licentiates from other Churches [2019]	CTM	Does this need updated?
Amalgamations and Charity Commission [2019]	Linkage	Update the language and check if there have been any changes in charity law that would mean a more general update is needed
Form of a Call to a Minister and Form of Call to a Minister (Part-Time Ministry Scheme) [2015]	Linkage	Update the language
Ministerial Expenses During the Illness of a Minister [2014]	Linkage	Is this redundant or does it need updated?
Course Requirements for those Training for the Ordained Ministry [2009]	CTM	Is this being updated or need updated?
Policy and Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse [2004]	CSW	This is over 20 years old and probably needs updated if an already updated policy does not exist
Travelling Expenses [2001]	Support Services Committee	Predates the change in expenses. Has this been superseded or does it need updated?
Magee University College Commission – Magee Fund Scheme [1979]	CTM	Update the language

To be updated by task group (2)

- Paper on adding a Band C Salary Scale to the recommended Salary Scales for Additional Pastoral Personnel [2019]
- Sick Supply Fund Rules [2014]

B. GUIDELINES (38)**Accept as is (23)**

- Pandemic Response [2023]
- CMI Church Planting Strategy [2023]
- CMI Missional Auxiliary Ministers [2023]
- CTM Flexible Pathway Review (also see 2019 report) [2023]
- The Way Forward if Kirk Session meetings cannot be held in-person [2022]
- The Way Forward with regard to other interim measures relating to congregations [2022]
- Interim Procedures relating to the election of Elders [2022]
- Role of Vacancy Conveners in Congregations where Stated Supply Ministry has been granted (first draft) [2022]
- Guidelines for Interview by Kirk Session and Hearing Committee [2018]
- Protracted Illness Guidelines [2018]
- Judicial Process Guidance for Presbyteries [2017]
- Multi-Faith Prayer at Civic Events [2017]
- Consultations [2017]
- Guidelines on Permissions Re Congregational Property [2017]
- Part-Time Ministry (Revised October 2015) [2016]
- Guidelines for Kirk Sessions in filling Auxiliary Ministry Posts [2016]
- Ad Hoc Committee on Judicial Appeals [2012]
- Ad Hoc Committee on Church Courts [2010]
- Assembly Venues [2007]
- Draft Guidelines for PCI Members on Public Events at which Representatives of Non-Christian Religions Participate [2005]
- New Marriage Guidelines [2004]
- Report on Freemasonry [1992]
- Sacramental Discipline in Baptism [1973]

Refer to council or committee (14)

Manses [2016]	Linkage	Needs a general update
Union Commission Guidelines on Associates [2015]	Linkage	Update language
The Implementation of a Scheme for Auxiliary Ministry [2015]	Linkage	Update language
Guidelines: Deferred Linkage [2013]	Linkage	Update language
Draft Guidelines for Presbytery Clerks on the Role of Presbyteries in the Employment of Additional Pastoral Personnel [2013]	Linkage	Is this redundant or does it need updated?
Review of the Application Process for the Ordained Ministry and of the ongoing effective assessment of ministry candidates prior to ordination [2013]	CTM	Has this been updated or does it need updated?
Proposed Presbytery Guidelines for Approving Elders Elect [2011]	CCLW	General update
The Role of Presbytery in Overseeing the Progress of Students for the Ministry [2009]	CTM	Has this been updated or does it need updated?
Presbytery Guidelines with Regard to Applicants for the Ordained Ministry, Ministerial Students and Licentiates [2007]	CTM	Has this been updated or does it need updated?
Guidelines on Eligibility of Assistants for Call [2006]	Linkage	Has this been updated or does it need updated?
Proposed Reception Procedure [2005]	CTM	Has this been updated or does it need updated?
Manses [2001]	Linkage	Needs a general update
The Appointment of Additional Pastoral Personnel [1997]	Linkage	Needs a general update
Redundant Manses [1992]	Linkage	Needs a general update

To be updated by the task group (1)

- Divorced Ministers (Revised) [1996]

C. GUIDANCE (26)

Accept as is (24)

- Statement of Faith and Order [2023]
- Implementation Task Group and Profession of Faith and Admission to Sacraments and Guidance for pastoral care of same-sex attracted people and their families [2021]
- Human Identity Task Group [2021]
- Human Rights [2019]
- Relationships with other Denominations – Reformed Doctrine [2017]
- Relationships with other Denominations – Global Mission [2017]
- Relationships with other Denominations – Church of Scotland [2017]
- Redundant Properties and Graveyards [2015]
- Charities Legislation Statements on Public Benefits Test [2015]
- The Question of Baptism [2014]
- To Marry only in the Lord [2012]
- Presence and Participation of Children in the Lord’s Supper [2009]
- Alternative Medicine and Therapies [2004]
- Divorce and Remarriage [2000]
- Payment of Vacancy Conveners [2000]
- Toronto Blessing [1996]
- Structuring Presbytery Business, etc [1996]
- Personnel in Presbytery [1996]
- Marriage and the Family [1995]
- Report on Freemasonry [1995]
- Report on Freemasonry (resolution) [1995]
- Nationhood [1994]
- Westminster Confession of Faith + the antichrist [1988]
- Diakonia – Service or Ministry [1973]

Refer to council or committee (2)

Models for Pastoral Care [2011]	CCLW	General update
Irregular Immigration: responding to a dilemma faced by Congregations and Individuals [2009]	CMI	Is this redundant or does it need updated?

D. SUMMARY DOCUMENT – new designation (4)**Accept as is (4)**

- Relationships with other Denominations – Human Sexuality And Marriage [2017]
- PCI Counselling Framework of Theology, Ethics And Practice [2017]
- Women in the Presbyterian Church [1990]
- The Ordination of Women [1973]

E. Requires further discussion before a final designation (2)**Accept as is (1)**

- Decision Making and Dissent [2023]

Refer to a council or committee (1)

Guidelines on handling reported cases of sexual impropriety within the ordained leadership of the Presbyterian Church In Ireland (approved by the General Board of PCI and forwarded to Clerks of Presbytery) [2012]	Taking Care Office	Needs a general update
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JONATHAN BOYD, Convener

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

1. The Nominations Committee has met on three occasions since the last General Assembly.
2. Members of the Committee have been able to interview applicants for convenorships and to identify nominations to fill the gaps in the several Councils and Committees. However, in all of this they are most grateful for the continual administrative support provided by staff from the General Secretary's Department.
3. During the year, advertisements were placed encouraging church members to offer themselves for service on General Assembly Councils and Committees. Online links to a digital Expression of Interest Form were circulated to ministers in the hope that they would share these with their congregations and encourage applications by suitably interested and gifted people.

4. The results flowing from the above-mentioned process have again been disappointing, yielding a total of 17 Expressions of Interest from less than 20 people, the majority of whom were ministers or Licentiates. Whilst grateful for each of these, it does seem that the current system of recruitment has reached a ceiling, and that consideration should be given to reviewing its effectiveness. This is especially the case as ministers tend to have greater representation through presbytery direct nominations. In addition, the limited number of expressions of interest reduces the Nomination Committee's ability to bring balance to Councils and Committees.
5. Since the last Assembly vacancies have arisen for the convenorship of several Councils and Committees. These have been duly advertised, and the process of interview and nomination followed through in each case.
6. Nominations to the membership of Commissions, Councils and Committees will be contained in the Nominations Booklet provided at the General Assembly. Regarding convenorships, it is proposed that the following resignations be accepted, and appointments made:
 - (a) the resignation of Mr David Thomson as Convener of the Support Services Committee [under General Council], that he be thanked for his services, and that Mr Hugo Wilson be appointed in his place.
 - (b) the resignation of Rev Stephen Richmond as Convener of the Congregational Witness Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev Jonny McKane be appointed in his place.
 - (c) the resignation of Rev Jane Nelson as Convener of the Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee [under CCLW], that she be thanked for her services, and that Mr Colin Neill be appointed in her place.
 - (d) the resignation of Rev Philip McCrea as Convener of the Congregational Life Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev James Rogers be appointed in his place.
 - (e) The Committee notes that Rev Stephen Lowry has tendered his resignation as Convener of the Disability Services Committee [under CSW]. Steps are being taken to bring a nomination for that convenorship.
7. The Committee is thankful to those who have indicated their willingness to fill the vacancies that have arisen during the year; however, it would be helpful if those intending to resign from membership of a Council or Committee would give notice in good time for a replacement to be found for nomination to the following General Assembly. Ideally, notice should be given by the preceding January.

TOM GREER, Convenor

REPORT OF THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IRELAND

(For information only)

Very Rev Dr Michael Barry writes:

The members of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland Council nominated by the General Council report that throughout 2024 the Council has continued to promote the study of the historic Churches of the Presbyterian order in Ireland and the contributions they have made to Irish society and the wider world.

It has continued to achieve this through a programme of talks and lectures, through its publications and website, and through the annual Field Trip.

1. It has continued to operate in line with the requirements of the Charity Commission, both in how it presents the accounts and as it seeks to meet other requirements as they are notified. It has tried to do this with great care and we believe it has been able to operate as a responsible charity.
2. The annual grant from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland remains the main source of income for the Society, augmented by donations from the other Churches of the Presbyterian order and membership fees, (especially from Associate Members who join on-line via the website).
3. The major areas of expenditure were the leasing and servicing of the Society's premises. Expenditure continues to be carefully controlled, quotations are obtained before significant items of expenditure are approved, and all areas are examined regularly for economies, so that the best value for money is obtained.
4. The Society is grateful for the use of the premises in Assembly Buildings which are conveniently located and well-appointed. It commends members of staff in Assembly Buildings for their cheerful helpfulness.
5. The topics of the programme of talks and lectures were: 'Catch My Pal' (Temperance Movement), 'Rev John Johnston's cause célèbre: Irish Presbyterianism and the Ulster Plantation in the Irish High Court, 1898', 'Jonathan Swift and Presbyterians', 'James Harshaw, Presbyterian Elder of Donaghmore Presbyterian Church and diarist, c. 1818–1864', and 'Presbyterians and opposition to slavery: principle, pragmatism and protest'. The annual Field Trip was to churches in east Down.
6. The Annual General Meeting took place at Whitehouse in March. This included the reappointment of the Revs Scott Moore and Jim Stothers as Joint Secretaries, and of Mr Stephen Johnston as Treasurer.

7. No new publications were produced this year. However, extensive work went on in connection with a once-in-a-generation work on the History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland by Rev Dr Bert Tosh. Preliminary work has also started on ‘Treasures of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland’, a lavishly illustrated book showcasing some of the more important items in the Society’s possession. Other publications are progressing and are intended for publication in 2025.
8. A significant event was the adoption of a new constitution at a Special General Meeting in November. The prime reason for this was to allow the Society to allow additional members to be appointed to Council. The arrangements for the General Council to appoint members to Council remain unchanged.
9. We concur with the Council’s gratitude to its Presbytery Historical Agents for how they publicise the work of the Society locally and with its intention to continue to support them in doing so.
10. It should be noted that the Society welcomes donations of books, pamphlets, congregational histories and suitable artefacts such as old-style communion tokens as well as congregational records and other archives of Irish Presbyterian interest. These may be deposited with the Society either as a gift or on indefinite loan. Almost all new accessions of records received have been fully catalogued. Of particular note among new accessions this year are: records of Second Newtownards and Great Victoria Street Presbyterian Churches and an illuminated address to the Rev Deane Knox Mitchell, Crumlin Road Presbyterian Church, 1919.
11. The Society continues to share information with other organisations, agencies and blogs, which help to raise its profile and publicise its publications. This includes an ongoing relationship with Union Theological College, and a Facebook page which has over a thousand followers.
12. The Society’s website (www.presbyterianhistoryireland.com) continues to be one of the principal means of communicating with the general public, and this is reflected by the numbers using it and joining the Society as Associate Members (147 in 2024). Web resources include:
 - Back Issues of Bulletins of the Society over five years old
 - Histories of Presbyterian Congregations
 - Minister Lists/Fasti/Student Lists
 - Presbyterian Magazines
 - First World War Roll of Honour
 - Out-of-Print Booklets
 - Transcripts and audio recordings of Lectures
 - Indexes to Records
 - County Guides to Presbyterian congregational records

13. The Council works hard to improve the number and range of articles on the history page, and in the updating and presentation of *A History of Presbyterian Congregations*. This year we have added articles on the Presbyterian Insurance Society, Assembly Buildings and Francis Calder, Animal Welfare Supporter and Anti-Slavery Campaigner. The Council has continued to work through its Action Plan.
14. The work of the team of volunteers who help out each week, filing, classifying library books, indexing and transcribing records, and preparing mailings is greatly appreciated.
15. Tribute is paid to Valerie Adams, the Librarian and Archivist, for all she does for the Society, and not least for all her adaptability and resourcefulness throughout the year.

PRESBYTERIAN CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

(For information only)

Mr Jason Nicholson (Executive Secretary) writes:

1. The Presbyterian Children's Society exists to support children in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. It works mainly through ministers to alleviate poverty and financial hardship for eligible families and their children, by providing regular and exceptional grants.
2. During 2024, approximately 843 children from 423 families were formally enrolled in the Society for help, by way of regular quarterly grants, with an additional 34 children from 15 other families receiving interim grant payments.
3. A total of 112 exceptional grants, to address emergency or crisis situations, were provided to help support Presbyterian families in a variety of challenging circumstances. The need for help was as a result of (among other things) bereavement, costs relating to separation or divorce, reduced working hours, illness, and the continued increase in the cost of living.
4. A special summer grant of £80 per child was paid to families receiving the Society's regular quarterly grants, with an increased special grant of £100 paid per child to families in the winter.
5. To help complement congregational pastoral care, the Society delivered another very successful Small Grant Scheme. Small grants were provided to twenty-one local congregations to deliver workshops covering topics such as autism, behaviour management, stress and anxiety, and digital resilience. Some congregations favoured other options, including support for parent and toddler groups, English Language support training, or summer lunch clubs.

6. The Society supported 24 eligible Presbyterian families to attend the PCI Family Holiday, with grants totalling £12,900. 2024 also marked the final year of the holiday, and the Society is privileged for having been able to support many families attend the holiday during its lifetime.
7. Across all grant categories (including the Small Grants Scheme and the PCI Family Holiday), the Society paid out £698,724 in grants for the benefit of Presbyterian children and young people. This is an increase on the previous year.
8. The backgrounds of families helped by the Society are diverse. Presbyterian children from family backgrounds of unemployment or low income, separation, divorce, bereavement, single parenthood or where a parent is in long-term hospital care, prison or is disabled, are all aided by the Society. In every circumstance, the Society's focus is on helping children reach their full potential regardless of their background or financial limitations.
9. At its Annual General Meeting, the Society acknowledged the overwhelming commitment of its congregational representatives, with lengthy service for some stretching over many decades.
10. Whilst the Society is not under the control of the General Assembly it continues to work collaboratively with the ministers of our Church and a number of General Assembly councils. This partnership is greatly appreciated and valued.
11. A range of congregational resources to inform the Church about our work are available from the Society's website: www.presbyterianchildrensociety.org
12. The Society's work is generously supported by many Presbyterian congregations and individuals. We give thanks for all those who have supported our work throughout the year, and commend the Society to the Church for its continued prayerful and financial support.

Note: the Presbyterian Children's Society and the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland are not under the control of the General Assembly. The reports are included for information only.

REPORTS OF PRESBYTERIES

The **ARDS PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Gareth Simpson is their Moderator; that the Rev Colin Megaw, Minister of Helen's Bay, retired on 5 January 2025; that the Rev Alistair Kennedy, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 May 2024; that the Rev Richard Houston presented credentials from the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster and was inducted to the work of Associate Minister in West Church, Bangor on 28 April 2024; that the Rev Gary Ball presented credentials from the Presbytery of East Belfast and was installed to the charge of Scrabo on 27 June 2024; that Mr Paul Bradley was ordained and installed to the charge of Glastry on 9 January 2025; that Mrs Francine Magill was licensed on 23 June 2024 and given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that Mr Thomas Moore was given credentials to the Presbytery of Armagh; that Mr Wallace Moore was given credentials to the Presbytery of Dublin & Munster; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs Craig Mawhinney, Lesley-Ann Wilson, Aaron Ditty and Ian Dennis; as licentiate, Mr Neil Stewart; as students, Mr Jack Neilly, Mrs Jo Calvert; that they held Consultations at West Church, Bangor and Movilla; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed; that voting on the adoption of the Final Draft of the Republished Code under the Barrier Act (Code Par. 112) was 43 for and none against.

The **ARMAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev J.M. Haugh is their Moderator; that the Rev C.U.R. Bradley, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 4 February 2025; that Mr A.W.T. Martin presented credentials from the Presbytery of Down and was ordained and installed to the charge of Loughgall and Tartaraghan on 29 November 2024; that Mr T.A.R. Moore presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ards and was ordained and installed to the charge of First Armagh and Tassagh on 31 January 2025; that Dr S.A. Moore was licensed on 28 April 2024; that Mr J.R. Jones was licensed on 23 June 2024; that Mr D. Ballantyne was licensed on 23 June 2024 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Iveagh; that Mr J.D. McKee presented credentials from the Presbytery of Newry and was received as a licentiate; that Mr J.M. Gawn was given credentials to the Presbytery of Monaghan; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev Dr J.W.P. McConnell; as licentiates, Dr S.A. Moore and Messrs J.R. Jones and J.D. McKee; as a student, Mr A. Richardson; that the Rev S. M. Hamilton, Chaplain in the Royal Navy, having been discharged from his role on 6 February 2024, was removed from the roll of Presbytery on 5 March 2024; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed; that voting on the adoption of the Final Draft of the Republished Code under the Barrier Act (Code Par. 112) was 29 for and none against.

The **BALLYMENA PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev R.J. Watt is their Moderator; that the Rev T.P. McCullough, Minister of Townhill, retired on 31 October 2024; that the Rev L.M. Keys, Associate Minister in West Church, Ballymena, retired on 1 January 2025; that the Rev Dr M.D. McNeely resigned his charge as Minister of Ballykeel on 2 March 2024 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal; that the Rev M.D. Boyd resigned as Associate Minister in First Ballymena on 31 March 2024; that the Rev B.A. Smyth resigned his charge as Minister of Trinity Ahoghill on 11 April 2024 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady; that Mr M.R.T. Rodgers presented credentials from the Presbytery of Tyrone and was ordained and installed to the charge of Clough on 29 November 2024; that Mr S. McKimm presented credentials from the Presbytery of Iveagh and was received as a licentiate under the care of Presbytery on 3 September 2024; that under their care are: as Ministers Without Charge, the Revs M.D. Boyd and D.A. McMillan; as licentiate, Mr S. McKimm; that no Consultations were held during the year; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed and that voting on the Final Draft of the Republished Code was as follows: for 31, against 1.

The **NORTH BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev R.E. McCormick is their Moderator; that the Rev A.K. Duddy, Minister of Woodvale, retired on 31 May 2024; that Mr Matthew Horner was ordained and installed to the charge of Eglinton on 15 March 2024; that the Rev T.D. Gribben presented credentials on transfer from Carrickfergus Presbytery; that Mr S.J. Scott was licensed on 30 June 2024; under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, the Revs Dr L.E. Carroll, K. Patterson and W.A. Shaw; as licentiates, Mr D. Dickinson and Mr S. Cairns; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately; and that 33 members of Presbytery voted on 1 October 2024 to approve the Revised Code of the Presbyterian Church, there were no votes against or abstentions.

The **SOUTH BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev A.J. Galbraith is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr J.C. McCullough, Professor Emeritus (Released), died on 24 November 2024; that the Rev R. Love, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 4 February 2025; that the Rev W.J. Orr, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 4 February 2025; that the Rev C.E. Heron, Minister of Dunmurry, resigned her charge on 13 September 2024; that Mr A. Ferguson presented credentials and was received as a licentiate; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs J.R. Burnett, C.E. Heron and Rev Dr C.I. Dickson; as licentiate, Mr A. Ferguson; as Transferring Ministers, Revs E. McCroskery and G. Shearer; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed; that the Presbytery vote in respect of the Barrier Act regarding the Republished Code was 18 votes for its adoption and none against.

The **EAST BELFAST PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev M.L. Gray is their Moderator; that the Rev R.D. Drysdale, Minister Emeritus (Released), of Belmont, died on 1 July 2024; that the Rev D. Rankin, Minister of Strand, retired on 30 April 2024; that the Very Rev Dr F.P. Sellar, Minister of Bloomfield, retired on 3 November 2024; that the Rev W. McKeown, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 4 February 2025; that the Rev G. Moffett, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 4 February 2025; that the Rev G. Ball, Associate Minister of Orangefield, resigned his charge on 26 June 2024 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; that the Rev J.L. Cochrane presented credentials from the Presbytery of Down and was installed to the charge of Ravenhill on 26 June 2024; that Mr Andrew Ferguson was licensed on 9 June 2024 and given credentials to the Presbytery of South Belfast; that Mr S.R. Woods, Mr M.A.L. Tyrell, Mrs F.P. Magill presented credentials and were received as licentiates; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, the Revs J.M. Casement, W.G. Hamilton, W.J. Harshaw (retired), Dr D.J. Montgomery and Dr M.J. Welsh; as licentiates, Mr A. Frazer, Mr S.J. Kerr, Mr S.R. Woods, Mr M.A.L. Tyrell and Mrs F.P. Magill; as a Transferring Minister, the Rev M. Gilicze; as students, Mr P. Huey, Miss K. Jardine, Mr S. McCombe, Mr B. Kirkwood and Mr P. McMillan; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed; that voting on the adoption of the Final Draft of the Republished Code sent down to Presbyteries was as follows: for 34, against 0.

The **CARRICKFERGUS PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Jonathan Moxen is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr Andrew Davison Mullan, Minister Without Charge, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Newry and was installed to the charge of Ballylinney on Friday 8 November 2024; that Mr Stephen Joseph McCleery was licensed as a Probationer for the Christian Ministry on 9 June 2024 at Greenisland; that Mr Myles Andrew Leslie Tyrell was licensed as a Probationer for the Christian Ministry on 23 June 2024 at Woodlands; that Mr Stephen Joseph McCleery (licentiate) was given credentials for presentation to the Route Presbytery, Mr Myles Andrew Leslie Tyrell (licentiate) was given credentials for presentation to East Belfast Presbytery; that the Rev Trevor David Gribben (Clerk of Assembly) was given credentials for presentation to North Belfast Presbytery; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, the Rev Thomas Neil Bingham; as licentiates, Martin Joseph Delaney and Dr Matthew William Hugh Houston; a Consultation was completed at Craigy Hill; that the Financial Reports of congregations, in the prescribed format, are being published, printed and distributed as appropriate; that the Barrier Act vote regarding the adoption of the Republished Code was taken as required: for republishing 22, against republishing 0.

The **COLERAINE AND LIMAVADY PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev J.G. Jones is their Moderator; that the Rev Brian Alexander Smyth, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ballymena and was installed to the charge of Main Street, Garvagh and Killaig on 12 April 2024; that Rev G.A. McCracken presented credentials from the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal and was installed to the charge of Ballywillan on 28 February 2025; that Mr Jonathan Boyd was licensed on 16 June 2024 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Dromore; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge, Rev Robert Kane; as students, Mr Thomas Black and Mr Joshua Lowry; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed; that voting on the adoption of the Final Draft of the Republished Code under the Barrier Act (Code Par. 112) was 39 for and 1 against.

The **DERRY AND DONEGAL PRESBYTERY** report that Rev S.W. Hibbert is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr D. Latimer, Minister Emeritus, became Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 May 2024; that the Rev Dr M.D. McNeely presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ballymena and was installed to the Home Mission and inducted to the charge of Fahan on 3 March 2024; that the Rev J.L. Blair resigned as Minister of Faughanvale on 15 September 2024 to be retained as Minister without Charge under the care of Presbytery; that the Rev G.A. McCracken resigned his charge on 27 February 2025 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Coleraine and Limavady; that the Rev K.G. Patterson, Minister without Charge under the care of Presbytery, was given credentials to the Presbytery of North Belfast on 7 May 2024; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Rev S. Richmond and Rev J.L. Blair; as student, Mr E. Peters; that no Consultations were held during the year; that the Financial Reports of Congregations are being printed; that the Republished Code as sent down from the 2024 General Assembly under the Barrier Act resulted in 25 voting for, 0 against and 0 abstentions.

The **DOWN PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev J.U. Torrens is their Moderator; that Mr E.G.D. Hanna was licensed on 23 June 2024 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Newry; that Mr Lucas da Costa was licensed on 6 October 2024; that Mr A.W.T. Martin was given credentials to the Presbytery of Armagh; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs Dr B.C.G. Black and R.C. Patton; as licentiate, Mr Lucas da Costa; that no Consultations were held; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed; that the Presbytery vote on the Barrier Act with regards to the Republished Code was unanimous. 28 for, 0 against.

The **DROMORE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Laszlo Orban is their Moderator; that the Rev Dr Jack Richardson, Minister Emeritus (Released) of Hillhall, died on 1 June 2024; that the Rev Howard Gilpin, Minister of Moira, retired on 30 September 2024; that the Rev Gary Trueman, Minister of Banbridge Road, Dromore, retired on 31 January 2025; that the Rev Dr Bert Tosh, Minister Emeritus, became a Minister Emeritus (Released) on 7 February 2025; that Mr Mark Hawthorne presented credentials from the Presbytery of Iveagh and was ordained and installed to the charge of Legacurry on 6 December 2024; that Mr Steven Woods was licensed on 16 June 2024 and given credentials to the Presbytery of East Belfast; that Mr Ryan Higgins and Mr Jonathan Boyd presented credentials and were received as licentiates; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev Scott Moore; as licentiates, Mr Graeme Read, Mr Ryan Higgins, Mr Jonathan Boyd; as students, Mr Ashley Parks and Mr Nathan Donnell; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed; that voting (in relation to the adoption of the new Code) sent down to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act was 28 for and 0 against.

The **DUBLIN AND MUNSTER PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Richie Cronin is their Moderator; that the Rev David Curran presented credentials from the Presbytery of Omagh and was installed in the Home Mission and inducted to the charge of Wexford Church Development on 20 September 2024; that the Rev Richard Houston, Minister of Lucan, resigned his charge on 27 April 2024 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ards; that the Rev Dr Colin Dickson, Assistant Minister of Adelaide Road, resigned his charge on 21 July 2024; that Mr Wallace Moore presented credentials from the Presbytery of Ards and was ordained and installed to the charge of Corboy and Mullingar on 11 January 2025; that Mr Josh McCance was ordained and installed as Assistant Minister in Donabate on 26 January 2025; that under their care are: as student, Mr Cillian McNamara; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed. That in relation to the adoption of the new Code, 31 voted for and none against.

The **IVEAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev A. Downey is their Moderator; that Mr S.P. McKimm received credentials to the Presbytery of Ballymena as a licentiate and Mr M.F. Hawthorne received credentials to the Presbytery of Dromore; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev P. Cleland; as licentaites, Mr S.I. McMenemy and Mr Daniel Ballantyne; as students, Mr J. Burke and Mr R. McClughan; that the financial reports of congregations are being printed; that the Presbytery voted unanimously in favour of the new Code, 38 for, none against

The **MONAGHAN PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Daniel Reyes Martin is their Moderator; that Mr Jeff Gawn, presented credentials from the Presbytery of Armagh and was ordained and installed to the charge of Ballyalbany and Glennan on 13 December 2024; that under their care is: as Minister without Charge, Rev Damien Boyle; that they held a Consultation at Dundalk; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately; that the Republished Code as sent down from the 2024 General Assembly under the Barrier Act resulted in 20 voting for, 0 against and 0 abstentions.

The **NEWRY PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev J.S. Maguire is their Moderator; that the Rev R.J. Mattison, Minister Emeritus (Released) of Cremore, Fourtowns and Poyntzpass, died on 8 December 2024; that Mr R.W.R. Higgins was licensed on 14 June 2024 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Dromore; that Mr J.D. McKee was licensed on 28 June 2024 and given credentials to the Presbytery of Armagh; that Mr E.G.D. Hanna and Mr S.J. Scott presented credentials and were received as licentiates; that under their care are: as a Minister without Charge, Rev B.A.H. Wilson; as licentiates, Mr E.G.D. Hanna and Mr S.J. Scott; as students, Mr M.B. Annett, Mr M.B. Banks, Mr A.W. Hanna and Mr G.A.N. McBride; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately; that the Republished Code as sent down from the 2024 General Assembly under the Barrier Act resulted in 25 voting for, 0 against and 0 abstentions.

The **OMAGH PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev J.J. Boyd is their Moderator; that the Rev D.P. Curran, Minister of Cavanaleck & Aughtentaine, resigned his charge on 31 August 2024 and was given credentials to the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster; that Rev S.P. Kennedy presented credentials from the Presbytery of Templepatrick and was installed to the charge of Enniskillen on 17 May 2024; that Mr S.W. Gaston presented credentials from the Presbytery of Templepatrick and was ordained and installed to the charge of First Castledearg & Killeter on 14 February 2025; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed separately; that the vote on the Final Draft of the Republished Code, as presented to the 2024 General Assembly and sent down to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act (Code Par 112) resulted as follows – votes for 21, votes against 11.

The **ROUTE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Dr A. Alves-Areias is their Moderator; that Mr S.J. McCleery presented credentials and was received as a licentiate; that under their care are: as Minister without Charge, Rev P. Douglas; as licentiate, Mr S.J. McCleery; that they held Consultations in Dervock and Roseyards; that Financial Reports of congregations are printed separately; that voting on The Code under Barrier Act took place resulting in 29 votes for, 1 against and no abstentions.

The **TEMPLEPATRICK PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev Stephen McNie is their Moderator, that the Rev T.H. Wilson, Minister Emeritus (Released), of Templepatrick, died on 3 February 2025; that Mr S.W. Gaston was given credentials to the Presbytery of Omagh; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs J.L. Tosh, D.J. Paul, Karen Campbell; as licentiate, Mr Billy Abwa; as student, Ms Christine Craig; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed. In relation to the vote under the Barrier Act in relation to the new Code, 19 voted for, 1 against.

The **TYRONE PRESBYTERY** report that the Rev M.J.O. Currie is their Moderator; that the Rev A.S. Thompson, Minister of Dungannon, resigned his charge on 10 February 2025 and was retained as a Minister without Charge; that Mr M.R.T. Rodgers, licentiate under the care of the Presbytery, was given credentials to the Presbytery of Ballymena; that under their care are: as Ministers without Charge, Revs W.I. Ferris and A.S. Thompson; that they held no Consultations; that the Financial Reports of congregations are being printed; that under the Barrier Act, Presbytery voted for the Republished Code to be adopted as the Code of the Church with twenty-six voting for and one voting against.

COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS

Convener: Rev DAVID W. BRICE

Secretary: Mr DERMOT PARSONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council report reflects the work of the Council for Social Witness, addressing both social care work for people in need and, through the Safeguarding Office, work to support congregations in making arrangements to ensure that they are safe places for the core work of the church. Significant advances in developing and implementing improved governance arrangements across the work have been made this year, both preparing the Council's services to support people with increasingly complex needs and providing more robust support to church leaders handling safeguarding matters. The two consistent themes of service improvement, while achieving financial viability, continue to be reflected in the operational plans agreed by Council for Social Witness, robustly underpinned by the commitment to ensuring that the love of God is discernible in all that it does.
2. The Specialist Services Committee oversees the work in services supporting people who have been engaged with the criminal justice system and those facing substance misuse challenges. The services have continued to be strengthened, while Council staff have worked to secure their financial footing.
3. The Safeguarding Development Committee oversees both continuing safeguarding work in congregations and the development of improved safeguarding approaches for the denomination. Policy development has moved forward well, with procedures currently under development.
4. The Older Peoples' Services Committee has responsibility for the work in residential care and nursing homes in Northern Ireland, and offers oversight to the Tritonville Close sheltered housing service in Ireland. There has been significant improvement in financial performance in a number of services with further work needed in 2025–6.
5. The Disability Services Committee oversees the work of the residential and supported living services provided to people with a disability in Northern Ireland, and the Kinghan Mission for the Deaf Community. Alignment with the Peacehaven service in County Wicklow is now largely complete. Work to secure the financial future of services has been productive, although further work is required in some services. There has been a significant change in management staffing and service reconfiguration is now underway.

Challenge and Progress

6. “Administration” is another word for getting things done and making things happen. Matt 25:20,21: The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more. His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’
7. The Council would prefer that this report were written in five months’ time because, by that time, it trusts, it will have had a senior management team functioning continuously for six months as well as a settled group of Service Managers in place. By implication it is clear that the opposite has been the case over the past year. Yet, despite the gaps in leadership, significant in-roads have been achieved in getting the financial deficit under control, strengthening links with funders, mentoring new managers but, most importantly, without the level of service as experienced by our residents and their families being affected.
8. The Council is aware that the above paragraph contains bureaucratic language but for that it makes no apology. CSW is a service provider for approximately 400 persons, its personnel work hard and are diligent in providing supportive management, with a budget of £15 million working in a highly regulated sector. By necessity, committee and council meetings often have highly technical content, members talk about their work, their effort, because they strive to progress. But they would wish to make the same point as above, at grassroots level users experience loving, gentle, personal care in a Christian environment where they have access to regular devotions, worship services and, in a growing number of the Council’s homes, a vibrant discipleship/prayer/support/group. “*You entrusted me*” is the take-away truth that is dear to the heart of each member of the Council. What is the focus of God’s trust? Not the £15 million, the 400 residents.
9. Promoting an understanding of safeguarding as a positive and integral part of PCI is at the heart of good faith-based safeguarding. Safeguarding is understood as part of our mission and purpose as a denomination, as something we are called to embrace while we seek to follow and reflect Jesus. Safeguarding policy and procedural development this year has been a critical piece of work which the safeguarding team have been focused on. This is challenging work for a denomination with such a wide variety of ministry. However, this has progressed steadily, reflected in the new draft Safeguarding Policies, the subject of a resolution at this Assembly (see Appendices 2–6).
10. The last three years of changes and attempts to consolidate have informed CSW of its strengths and weaknesses, and the Council can now quantify what inhibits and what enhances. Along with all Councils, CSW anticipates the process of reconfiguration, welcomes it and believes it could be the stimulus that rebalances the demographic of its client group and increases its engagement with those in the middle of their lives facing brokenness and hopelessness.

Culture

11. In recent years the Council has seen an increasing focus on published standards and regulations in many areas of life. In many ways this has been a good thing, as provision for the public can now be evaluated as being acceptable – or not. At the same time, there has been concern whether the focus on regulation would produce characterless, impersonal services which lack the hallmark of love for people in how they are delivered.
12. It is a question of culture: not just the culture that it inhabits, but whether Council for Social Witness can create a distinctive culture in what it does. In a 2020 article, Dr James Anderson has described culture as “simply what we do with what God has made”, and again states “all culture is religious in nature because all culture reflects some sort of value system.... even a secular culture is in fact deeply religious at its root.” So that challenges the Council in whether it reflects properly the love of God in its services, or whether the Council has conformed to the secular culture of services that are merely linked to the state’s standards.
13. In Council for Social Witness services this tension has been felt as it has striven to provide services that succeed in a highly regulated environment, while also remaining ‘warm’ services where the people it serves feel the care of its staff and can start to know the reality of individual people truly mattering to God. It is both critically important and challenging for CSW to deliver services that reflect the love of God and this year it has been wonderful to be aware of individual staff, managers and people it cares for who have made profound personal responses to Christ.
14. That is not a statement that could be made by other providers of social care and the Council’s senior team is deeply happy to work for a church that recognises the spiritual aspects of social need and provides services that touch on the deepest needs of humankind. It needs to be clear – if Council for Social Witness services do not reflect the love of God for people, if they do not offer care to marginalized people who may be overlooked by other providers, then there should be serious questions about why the church is putting so much effort into providing what would simply be mainstream service provision, potentially delivered better by commercial service providers. Increasingly CSW staff recognise that every year they encounter many hundreds of people who have no other present or past church connection – residents, families, staff. This gives the Council opportunities, and responsibilities, to show them what a living faith can mean – and it may be that it is the final opportunity for many of these people to recognise this fundamental truth.
15. It also takes a particular personal commitment to work in a service that aspires to meet practical and spiritual needs in this way and gratitude is expressed for the strong team in the Social Witness Department.
16. Culture is particularly crucial in safeguarding – CSW needs to carefully ensure that PCI’s safeguarding approach is gently evidenced as an underpinning for the church’s work with children and adults, while a strongly protective response to concerns can be consistently called into play when needed.

Last year, the work of CSW's Safeguarding Panel helped us recognise the magnitude of the challenge in this area. This year there have been major achievements in developing compassionate safeguarding approaches with a strong set of draft policies, carefully considered by members of the CSW Safeguarding Development Committee whose members are steeped in experience within the church, coming to the General Assembly (Appendix 1). Within this new policy framework, a range of procedures is currently being developed to give clear and contemporary guidance to leaders across the denomination. This development work, alongside the work to assist congregations to engage robustly with offenders who have faith, has taken strong steps forward this year under the leadership of Jayne Bellingham, who has been capably supported by Geoff Marshall and Kara Parker.

17. In the Council's care services staff have lived the challenge of developing services that show distinctive elements of the love of God for broken people, while working as servant leaders. This has not been easy – it is an approach that does not exist in mainstream care services and some managers have departed. Challenges in services continue to be met with openness and honesty and where changes are necessary to improve the lives of service users, they will be made. The present senior team in care – Caroline Yeomans, Julie Gibson and Lisa Gibson, can testify that the walk of servant leadership in the current care environment is tough, yet the staff team continue to be seen exploring, finding and living out their faith.
18. The Council also knows it is time for change and it is making ready. In this light, the Council for Social Witness's decision to adopt a realistic but stretching set of business objectives for 2025–6 (Appendix 1) is commendable. The Council must not find itself doing what others can do better; at the same time the Council must not find itself lacking a compassionate response to those with disabilities, people struggling with substance and offending issues – or even older people facing challenges arising from such problems earlier in their lives. This requires a realignment of priorities in the senior team, which has been very mindful of God's selection of David, alongside the rejection of his apparently suitable brothers, in 1 Samuel 16. Part of the Council's preparedness requires better stewardship of the resources that God has seen fit to give it. It has been a struggle this year to improve financially, with inadequate staffing meaning that some budget problems have still not been tackled. Despite that, without any doubt substantial improvement has been achieved in the Council's financial position and its aim is that, going forward, CSW will generate resources to support the work with key marginalised groups. The Council is particularly appreciative of the work of Finance Manager, David Hooks, and more recently Tracey Wilson, in making this encouraging progress.

SPECIALIST SERVICES COMMITTEE

19. The specialist services continue to operate in an ever increasingly complex societal environment, seeing first-hand the impact of trauma on individuals and their lives, the increase of alcohol and drug use, relational breakdowns, homelessness and poor mental health. The Committee would like to acknowledge that the staff teams working in Thompson House, Carlisle House and Gray's Court show unconditional support and encouragement to all who cross their thresholds.
20. Thompson House continues to operate at full capacity, highlighting the essential nature of the service for those leaving prison, not only serving as a place to live but offering meaningful support in all aspects of community living, including teaching the residents how to cook, develop employment skills and planning for moving on.
21. Thompson House had a 'Supporting People' validation assessment in July 2024 and the Committee is pleased to report that the feedback from the assessors was excellent, with only one small area of improvement identified – a testament to the dedicated work of the staff team.
22. Thompson House was also successful in achieving an increase in Housing Benefit and other statutory funding payments. This additional income has ensured that Thompson House has moved into a viable financial position, giving hope for ongoing future provision.
23. The Council's Mission Statement 'People Matter to God' is at the centre of all interactions between staff and residents, which is never more evident than when staff hold Bible studies and teach residents about the love God has for them. These teachings are then brought to life with the compassionate, unconditional support shown to those in its communities who need it most.
24. An independent review of Tier 4b services (residential rehabilitation), of which Carlisle House is one, has recently been published. The Committee is pleased to report that the review commented very favourably about Carlisle House, paying particular note to the high quality of the therapeutic interventions offered during treatment.
25. There continue to be financial challenges for Carlisle House, operating in a sector where funding is not readily available. Currently work is underway to explore additional funding streams to ensure the viability of the service and the Committee is keen to see this undertaken quickly by the Council's Executive team.
26. The Health and Social Care Regulator (RQIA) carried out a recent inspection and identified a number of areas for improvement; the Committee notes that the management team are working with key stakeholders to address this and an action plan is in place.
27. The service remains actively engaged in a post-programme partnership with EXTERN through the delivery of THE HUB initiative, which has received positive feedback. In addition, the Peer Support Group, RECONNECT, continues to be offered as part of the service's ongoing support framework.

28. Grays Court was also highlighted in the independent review of Tier 4b services, citing it as a best practice example of the importance of stable accommodation in the recovery process. Grays Court continues to deliver a supportive service focusing on the development of independent living skills and maintenance of recovery and the Committee commends the commitment of the team in doing so.
29. The Committee wishes to extend its thanks and appreciation to all of the staff who work within Specialist Services. It is recognised that it can be a complex area to work within and the team's dedication and compassion ensures that the Church is providing a meaningful witness to those in need.

CHARLES McMULLEN, Convener

SAFEGUARDING DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

30. It has been a year of positive activity in regards to the Safeguarding functions of the denomination.
31. With the commitment to develop safeguarding approaches beyond "Taking Care", and a new suite of Safeguarding Policies and Procedures being developed for implementation, the Safeguarding Development Committee has led the progress of new policies for the denomination; this has involved development of policies relating to child and adult safeguarding in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland – distinct and specific to each jurisdiction. A further policy covers Criminal Records Checks.
32. Our denomination plays a vital role in the lives of many children, young people and adults. All those who contribute to the life of our local congregations have a part to play in keeping people safe. The church achieves this in the arrangements we make in our congregations through well planned, safe environments. This Committee aims to facilitate these arrangements with clear procedures for volunteers and staff.
33. Individual congregations, and the PCI Safeguarding Team, also play an important role in responding effectively and compassionately when someone comes forward to share concerns or to disclose abuse. Promoting an understanding of safeguarding as a positive and integral part of PCI is at the core of good faith-based safeguarding. Therefore, recognising that safeguarding is at the heart of our theology, rather than a secular, tick-box add-on, is important in the effort to win hearts and minds.
34. The Council for Social Witness upholds safeguarding as part of our mission and purpose as a denomination, as something we are called to embrace while we seek to follow and reflect Jesus.
35. The Safeguarding Development Committee sees that there is an opportunity now to reframe safeguarding at the front line of our denomination – that is, on the ground in our local congregations and ministries. It can empower and enable Kirk Sessions, Designated Persons and local congregations to

feel equipped for the challenges of safeguarding. But this is a process that must be steeped in knowledge of both scripture and legislation. It must have a humility of approach reflecting an openness to learn and have perspectives changed. It requires a patience that needs to work alongside an urgency at some points.

36. Careful, considered and intelligent communication is needed outwards from the Safeguarding Team, including the Safeguarding Development Committee, to the denomination's leadership, to the local congregational leadership, to those who work with children and young people and to the individual who bravely steps forward. The Committee is grateful for the wisdom demonstrated by CSW's Safeguarding Lead, Jayne Bellingham, and her colleagues Kara Parker and Geoff Marshall in taking this work forward.
37. The Council for Social Witness will support the denomination to develop the recognition that safeguarding is a central component to our mission; when we do it well, we are proclaiming the excellencies of our Lord Jesus. The Bible is our reference point, where we find guidance in how to safeguard others as part of, not only our legal and ethical duty, but as who we are as a denomination at heart.

CHARLES McMULLEN, Convener

DISABILITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

38. This report begins with staff as the Committee is always in awe of the commitment, zeal, and motivation of its staff, especially (but by no means exclusively) the senior management staff: Dermot, Caroline, Jayne, and now the new regional care managers Julie Gibson and Lisa Gibson. Welcome to the team!
39. Not enough can be said about how much the staff do; nor could enough be said about how much they are vitalising other staff members within the homes to achieve more - with heart. The Committee gives thanks to God for such a wealth of resources in the form of people willing to honour God with their service and commitment.
40. **Kinghan Church:** KC continues to enjoy worship and fellowship as a community for deaf people in the heart of Belfast's Botanic Avenue.
41. The Committee owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to its two staff members in KC, Judith Currie and Clare Nicholson, who have gone way beyond the bounds of contract and expectation to serve the people of KC and the surrounding community.
42. Many people are serving within KC and, in particular, thanks are expressed to those providing Bible teaching and pastoral care. Rev. Will Murphy continues to play a large role and welcome too is the recent involvement of Rev. Jack Lambe.

43. The care homes each continue to be places of care and kindness for individuals and their families, in Christ's Name. Each resident is an individual who is treated as a precious image-bearer of God. Many of these individuals have very specific care needs, and care needs that often change with time. The care homes have always met these needs with compassion and professionalism.
44. **Willow Brook:** The utmost thanks and appreciation must be expressed to Francis Mooney who is temporarily managing Willow Brook. He has brought experience and expertise and is going the extra mile (literally) to be there. Willow Brook staff are thriving under his support. Residents are actively involved with staff in a number of activities on site, and off, even including a retirement party for a service user.
45. **Aaron House:** Occupancy remains high in Aaron House with 14 permanent beds and two respite beds. Residents are enjoying many activities and celebrations - most recently planting sunflowers and tomatoes in anticipation of Spring.
46. The Day Care facilities in Aaron are under pressure due to the layout of the building and plans are underway to rethink the best way to provide this service.
47. The Committee is grateful to Kelly Wilson and Pauline Allen managing both services.
48. **Lawnfield:** Occupancy remains high in Lawnfield with 14 permanent spaces and four respite spaces. There are currently many staffing positions being recruited, both in day and night services. Due to longstanding vacancies, agency costs are higher than anticipated in the budget. The Committee is grateful to Jordan Anderson for working as interim manager whilst the permanent manager role is filled.
49. The Committee continues to take note of the particular issues regarding the general recruitment of staff within the health and social care sector, to which Disability Services have not been immune. It appreciates the work and effort of Sarah Leung and Judith Johnston (HR) in investigating this and strategies being rolled out to counter this.
50. The Committee also takes note of the increase in costs right across the Council for heat, light, staffing, and food costs.
51. The work and ministry of everyone involved in CSW, Disability Services, not to mention the surrounding work by HR, Admin staff, and David Hooks in Finance, is an invaluable witness to the world that all people matter to God. It is a privilege to serve the most vulnerable in society and be able to treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve as precious image bearers of God.

STEPHEN LOWRY, Convener

OLDER PEOPLES' SERVICES COMMITTEE

52. Older Peoples' Services continues to work through a challenging programme of change and service improvement.
53. The appointment of a number of permanent Senior Managers and, recently, Home Managers has provided a stable platform from which to progress the business objectives of this service. The Committee is grateful for the support of the Human Resources Department in facilitating the speedy recruitment of staff. The use of agency staff has been managed down, although further work to reduce this dependency is required.
54. The financial position, while improving, continues to pose significant challenges. The fabric of care homes deteriorates with the intense demands of residents and staff, so a significant level of investment is required in order to maintain an appropriate environment and standards for residents.
55. To make best use of resources and facilities, the goal is to have 95% of available beds occupied, and staff have worked very hard to achieve an average occupancy cross the estate of 95.6%.
56. Senior managers continue to work systematically with each home to review the dependency levels and the needs of residents. One result of this review process has been the introduction and ongoing review of new staff rotas, to ensure that the right levels of staffing and associated skills are available to residents when required. While some staff expressed some initial reservations about this process, the outcomes have resulted in improved rota patterns for staff and a greater sense of the positive contribution staff make to the daily life and wellbeing of residents. Staff are now generally accepting of the benefits of the resulting changes to working practices and scheduling.
57. As many of the Committee's services have identified, there are continual issues regarding appropriate referrals to homes. The limited availability of places within the homes for people with dementia, and rising levels of dementia-related needs, means that an increase in provision in this area is being explored.
58. The Committee's services continue to be subject to regular inspections, both announced and unannounced. Where areas for improvement are identified, these are addressed in a timely manner, and robust improvement plans are implemented. Where issues are identified by local Health and Social Care Trusts, these are also addressed quickly and thoroughly in partnership with external colleagues.
59. Older Peoples' Services is currently working with Dublin and Munster Presbytery to clarify the governance arrangements for services delivered through Tritonville Close in Dublin.

JOYCE McKEE, Convener

APPENDIX 1

Objective number	Proposed 2025-26 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner	Comment
Council wide objectives					
2023/6	Refresh and clarify the roles of the local support committees. Write clear terms of reference.	This has not been achievable to date.	Jan 2026	CSW Convener and Council Secretary	Delayed
2025/1	Develop a training and development plan for staff that supports our operational activities	Not yet initiated	Sept 2025	Training Manager	
2025/2	Develop and deliver a management development programme for first line service managers	Not yet initiated	Dec 2025	Council Secretary; Regional Managers; Safeguarding Lead	
2025/3	Provide budget reports and financial analysis to senior and first line CSW Managers each month	Budget information not reliably available to date	Dec 2025	Finance Manager	Work underway

Objective number	Proposed 2025-26 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner	Comment
2025/4	Complete individual staff and facilities budget model and develop robust model for financial stability	Budget information not reliably available to date	June 2025	Council Secretary; Regional Managers; Finance Manager	Work underway
2025/5	Manage individual services in line with budget and staffing models	Budget information not reliably available to date	Dec 2025	Regional Managers	Work underway
2025/6	Ensure stability and continuity in CSW senior team		Dec 2025	CSW Convener	
2024/6	Produce quarterly financial performance information for the Council for Social Witness	Partially achieved	June 2025	Finance Manager	Work underway

Objective number	Proposed 2025-26 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner	Comment
Safeguarding					
2025/7	Submit for approval a revised suite of Safeguarding Policies to General Assembly	In progress; ready for Council approval	June 2025	Safeguarding Lead	Substantial progress
2025/8	Complete a revised suite of Safeguarding Procedures for dissemination across the denomination	In progress; will be reviewed by Safeguarding Development Committee routinely before issue	Jan 2026	Safeguarding Lead	Work underway
2025/9	Develop an effective communication and implementation strategy for the new procedures across the denomination	Work not commenced	Jan 2026	Safeguarding Lead	Work underway
2025/10	Partner with I.T team to build and implement a central system for the management of safeguarding records; develop a safe and contemporaneous system.	Draft mapping has completed. IT are sketching out timeframes for this system.	Sept 2025	Head of IT and Safeguarding Lead	Substantial progress

Objective number	Proposed 2025-26 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner	Comment
2025/11	Implement a set of Quality Standards for Safeguarding Practice and Procedures across the denomination; evidence and report to these standards to church governance	Version 1 of the Standards for Safeguarding are in place and one report against them has been given to SDC.	Dec 2025	Safeguarding Development Committee and Safeguarding Lead	Work underway
2025/12	Conduct a historical review of safeguarding practices across the denomination, to inform learning and development	Failed recruitment to key roles, mainly the Independent Chair, has stalled any meaningful progress at this time.	Sept 2025	Safeguarding Lead and Council Secretary	Work underway
CSW General Service Objectives					
2024/4	Complete and maintain updated needs/dependency information for all service users in each service to inform funding negotiations and staffing arrangements	Partially complete; delayed by senior team staff shortages	September 2025	Regional Managers	Work underway

Objective number	Proposed 2025-26 objective	Current status	Target date(s)	Owner	Comment
2024/8	Achieve implementation of an electronic care system	Delayed owing to resource constraints. 2025 dates established	Pilot site live in April 2025 and all services by Dec 2025	Regional Managers and Head of IT	Work underway
2025/15	Ensure standardized working practices across all similar service locations	Inconsistencies in records and some practices	Dec 2025	Council Secretary; Regional Managers	Work underway
2025/16	Appoint Records Manager and secure improved archiving arrangements	Inconsistencies in practice noted; unsuccessful recruitment to date	Dec 2025	Council Secretary	Work underway
Buildings and Maintenance					
2023/25	Develop a costed renewal and replacement program for CSW Services	This work is deferred into 2025 owing to complexity	Dec 2025	Council Secretary; Regional Managers; Finance Manager	Delayed

APPENDIX 2

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND NORTHERN IRELAND ADULT SAFEGUARDING

1. Policy

(a) Policy Statement

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland promotes a zero-tolerance approach to abuse, wherever it occurs or whoever is responsible.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is committed to practices that promote the welfare of adults and prevent harm.

It is the policy of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to safeguard to the best their ability all adults interacting with its ministry. This includes both preventing harm from occurring and actively taking actions to protect when an adult is at risk of being harmed or harm has occurred and we are aware of it.

The denomination demonstrates and achieves this by providing this policy and accompanying procedures, for all involved in adult ministry within the denomination, to ensure that all adults can engage with us, free from the threat of harm or abuse, and in a safe environment.

(b) Biblical basis for Safeguarding

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland determines first and foremost that we have a biblical imperative for safeguarding.

Safeguarding is vital for our denomination and a central component to our mission; when we do it well, we are proclaiming the excellencies of our Lord Jesus.

It is therefore our duty to use the Bible as our reference point, where we find guidance in how to safeguard others as part of, not only our legal and ethical duty, but as who we are as a denomination at heart.

For example;

- love our neighbour as ourselves, (Lev 19:18 / Luke 10:27 / Gal 5:13–15)
- treat others as we would want to be treated (Matt 7:12)
- meet the needs of others (Romans 15:1–2 / Philippians 2:3–4)
- seek justice and correct oppression (Psalm 89:14 / Isaiah 1:17 / Micah 6:8)
- protecting the weak and those in need (Psalm 82:3-4 / Matt 18:10)

(c) **Legal Context**

This policy and accompanying procedures have been developed with the following legislation and guidance documents considered, which all seek to safeguard adults;

- The rights of adults to live a life free from neglect, exploitation and abuse are protected by the Human Rights Act 1998.
- Their right to life is protected (under Article 2); their right to be protected from inhuman and degrading treatment (under Article 3); and their right to liberty and security (under Article 5).

Additional areas of legislation that inform this policy and accompanying procedures include;

- The Criminal Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1967
- The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 (as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012)
- The Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001
- The Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Orders and the Health and Social Care (Reform) Act (Northern Ireland) 2009
- The Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986
- The Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997
- The Public Interest Disclosure (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- The Family Homes and Domestic Violence (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- The Northern Ireland Act 1998, Section 75
- The Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999
- The Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008
- The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007
- The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015

The Adult Protection Bill, (NI), remains pending implementation at the date of this policy issue.

Additional Policy Context

The regional adult safeguarding policy “Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership” was launched in July 2015. The policy was jointly developed and published by the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive.

This sets out how the Northern Ireland Executive intends adult safeguarding to be taken forward across all Government Departments, their agencies and in partnership with the voluntary, community, independent and faith organisations.

(d) **Core Principles**

This Policy and accompanying procedures will state clearly the arrangements for adult safeguarding, including preventative and protective measures.

We understand that not all adults coming into contact with our missions or ministries are formally members of our denomination. We want to promote confidence that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is safe for all.

We understand that safeguarding involves a wide range of activity and the church plays a vital role in both the prevention of harm and the protection from harm of adults in our communities.

All safeguarding for adults is underpinned by the core principles of respect for the unique worth of each individual, and ensuring all adults in contact with our ministry are treated with dignity.

This policy applies to all aspects of ministry and work within Presbyterian Church in Ireland, whether this be within a church building or elsewhere.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland will therefore;

1. Ensure that every congregation/linked congregations has an aligned Kirk Session approved Adult Safeguarding Champion
2. Maintain robust procedures for the recruitment, checking and monitoring of staff and volunteers working with adults at risk of harm
3. Ensure effective working structures are in place to respond to concerns and these are clearly understood through a regular system of training staff and volunteers
4. Ensure the denomination has clear processes for the reporting of abuse and the risk of harm, in regards to any adult at risk, both externally to statutory services and internally through a clearly identified chain of responsibility
5. Ensure that identified risks to adults are assessed and managed, ensuring general safety and risk management procedures are adhered to
6. Ensure that any person of risk engaged in our ministries (for example those with a history of serious offending behaviour) is safely managed, monitored and supported
7. Ensure that we have a timely, effective and sensitive approach to managing non-recent abuse disclosures

8. Ensure we have safe and confidential methods for managing information
9. Ensure that safeguarding procedures signpost to the appropriate department of the church for the management of comments, complaints and suggestions

This Policy will be executed across the denomination in Northern Ireland through a series of procedures.

This policy applies to all aspects of ministry and work within Presbyterian Church in Ireland, whether this be within a church building or elsewhere.

This Policy is displayed at each local congregation.

Provision of alternative formats, when necessary, for example, large print or easy read versions, can be accessed via PCI Safeguarding Office.

(e) **Review**

This Policy will be reviewed every three years by Council for Social Witness. Changes will be reported to the General Assembly, with the Assembly being asked to approve any significant policy changes.

If there is a legislative change that requires the Policy to be updated or reviewed within that time period, this will be the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness. Where this is urgent, the General Council can act on behalf of the General Assembly to approve a significant policy change. The Safeguarding Lead will advise them if this is the case.

Accompanying procedure will be reviewed at least every three years by the Safeguarding Development Committee, Council for Social Witness, as well as at any point there are legislative/good practice updates required.

Procedural changes will be reported to the Council for Social Witness, with the Council being asked to approve any significant procedural changes.

It is the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness, to ensure changes are communicated in a timely and effective manner to the denomination.

Policy End

APPENDIX 3

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND REPUBLIC OF IRELAND ADULT SAFEGUARDING

1. Policy

(a) Policy Statement

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland promotes a zero-tolerance approach to abuse, wherever it occurs or whoever is responsible.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is committed to practices that promote the welfare of adults and prevent harm.

It is the policy of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to safeguard to the best their ability all adults interacting with its ministry. This includes both preventing harm from occurring and actively taking actions to protect when an adult is at risk of being harmed or harm has occurred and we are aware of it.

The denomination demonstrates and achieves this by providing this policy and accompanying procedures, for all involved in adult ministry within the denomination, to ensure that all adults can engage with us, free from the threat of harm or abuse, and in a safe environment.

(b) Biblical basis for Safeguarding

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland determines first and foremost that we have a biblical imperative for safeguarding.

Safeguarding is vital for our denomination and a central component to our mission; when we do it well, we are proclaiming the excellencies of our Lord Jesus.

It is therefore our duty to use the Bible as our reference point, where we find guidance in how to safeguard others as part of, not only our legal and ethical duty, but as who we are as a denomination at heart.

For example;

- love our neighbour as ourselves, (Lev 19:18 / Luke 10:27 / Gal 5:13–15)
- treat others as we would want to be treated (Matt 7:12)
- meet the needs of others (Romans 15:1–2 / Philippians 2:3–4)
- seek justice and correct oppression (Psalm 89:14 / Isaiah 1:17 / Micah 6:8)
- protecting the weak and those in need (Psalm 82:3–4 / Matt 18:10)

(c) **Legal Context**

- Safeguarding Vulnerable Persons at Risk of Abuse – National Policy and Procedures (2014)
- National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012
- Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information of Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012
- Criminal Law (Sexual offences) Act 2017

(d) **Core Principles**

This Policy and accompanying procedures will state clearly the arrangements for adult safeguarding, including preventative and protective measures.

We understand that not all adults coming into contact with our missions or ministries are formally members of our denomination. We want to promote confidence that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is safe for all.

We understand that safeguarding involves a wide range of activity and the church plays a vital role in both the prevention of harm and the protection from harm of adults in our communities.

All safeguarding for adults is underpinned by the core principles of respect for the unique worth of each individual, and ensuring all adults in contact with our ministry are treated with dignity.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland will therefore;

1. Ensure that every congregation/linked congregations has an aligned Kirk Session approved Adult Safeguarding Champion
2. Maintain robust procedures for the recruitment, checking and monitoring of staff and volunteers working with adults at risk of harm
3. Ensure effective working structures are in place to respond to concerns and these are clearly understood through a regular system of training staff and volunteers
4. Ensure the denomination has clear processes for the reporting of abuse and the risk of harm, in regards to any adult at risk, both externally to statutory services and internally through a clearly identified chain of responsibility
5. Ensure that identified risks to adults are assessed and managed, ensuring general safety and risk management procedures are adhered to
6. Ensure that any person of risk engaged in our ministries (for example those with a history of serious offending behaviour) is safely managed, monitored and supported
7. Ensure that we have a timely, effective and sensitive approach to managing non-recent abuse disclosures

8. Ensure we have safe and confidential methods for managing information
9. Ensure that safeguarding procedures signpost to the appropriate department of the church for the management of comments, complaints and suggestions

This Policy will be executed across the denomination in Republic of Ireland through a series of procedures.

This policy applies to all aspects of ministry and work within Presbyterian Church in Ireland, whether this be within a church building or elsewhere.

This Policy is displayed at each local congregation.

Provision of alternative formats, when necessary, for example, large print or easy read versions, can be accessed via PCI Safeguarding Office.

(e) **Review**

This Policy will be reviewed every three years by Council for Social Witness. Changes will be reported to the General Assembly, with the Assembly being asked to approve any significant policy changes.

If there is a legislative change that requires the Policy to be updated or reviewed within that time period, this will be the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness. Where this is urgent, the General Council can act on behalf of the General Assembly to approve a significant policy change. The Safeguarding Lead will advise them if this is the case.

Accompanying procedure will be reviewed at least every three years by the Safeguarding Development Committee, Council for Social Witness, as well as at any point there are legislative/good practice updates required.

Procedural changes will be reported to the Council for Social Witness, with the Council being asked to approve any significant procedural changes.

It is the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness, to ensure changes are communicated in a timely and effective manner to the denomination.

Policy End

APPENDIX 4

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND NORTHERN IRELAND CHILD SAFEGUARDING

1. Policy

(a) Policy Statement

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland believes that everyone has a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and to keep them safe.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland believes that children should never experience abuse of any kind.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is committed to safeguarding all children and protecting them from harm.

It is the policy of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to safeguard all children and young people interacting with its ministry in any form. This includes actively protecting children from all forms of harm or abuse.

The denomination demonstrates and achieves this by providing this policy and accompanying procedures, for all involved in youth and children's work and any form of children or youth ministry within the denomination, to ensure that children and young people enjoy their engagement with our denomination, free from the threat of abuse and in a safe environment.

(b) Biblical basis for Safeguarding

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland determines first and foremost that we have a biblical imperative for safeguarding.

Safeguarding is imperative for our denomination and a central component to our mission; when we do it well, we are proclaiming the excellencies of our Lord Jesus.

It is therefore our duty to use the Bible as our reference point, where we find guidance in how to safeguard others as part of, not only our legal and ethical duty, but as who we are as a denomination at heart.

For example;

- love our neighbour as ourselves, (Lev 19:18 / Luke 10:27 / Gal 5:13–15)
- treat others as we would want to be treated (Matt 7:12)
- meet the needs of others (Romans 15:1–2 / Philippians 2:3–4)
- seek justice and correct oppression (Psalm 89:14 / Isaiah 1:17 / Micah 6:8)

- protecting the weak and those in need (Psalm 82:3-4/ Matt 18:10)

(c) **Legal Context**

This policy and accompanying procedures have been developed with the following legislation and guidance documents considered, which all seek to protect and safeguard children;

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)
- The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, October 2024
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007
- The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015

(d) **Core Principles**

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland engages with children and young people throughout the island of Ireland and welcomes those from households where there is no Presbyterian or other denominational connection.

The welfare of any child is paramount, no matter how brief their engagement with our denomination or small the organisation they attend.

All children, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have the right to equal protection from all forms of harm or abuse.

We recognise some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, communication needs, disabilities, adverse environments and other issues.

The voices of children and young people are crucial to our learning and development as a safe denomination and we seek to always improve our engagement with them.

The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, highlights the following key principles:

- The child or young person welfare is paramount
- The voice of the child or young person should be heard
- Parents should be supported and families helped to stay together
- Children should be safe from harm at all times, including when a parent is not meeting their needs
- Partnership with statutory services is required to ensure effective safeguarding

- Prevention and our role therein should be a focus for all organisations working with children
- Responses to issues should be proportionate and decision making should be well informed

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland will therefore;

1. Ensure that every congregation has an aligned Designated Person
2. Maintain robust procedures for the recruitment, checking and monitoring of staff and volunteers working with children
3. Ensure that anyone engaging with children and young people through the denomination will be trained at least once every three years in how to recognise, respond to and report abuse as well as understand their role in the prevention of abuse
4. Ensure the denomination has clear processes for the reporting of abuse and the risk of harm, both externally to statutory services and internally through a clearly identified chain of responsibility
5. Ensure that identified risks to children and young people are assessed and managed
6. Ensure that any person of risk engaged in our ministries (for example those with a history of serious offending behaviour) is safely managed, monitored and supported
7. Ensure that we have a timely, effective and sensitive approach to managing non-recent abuse disclosures
8. Ensure that children and young people from other countries are protected and cared for while engaging in our ministries and missions
9. Ensure we have appropriate and actual methods for children and young people to voice their opinions and concerns, and be listened and responded to
10. Ensure we have safe and confidential methods for managing information

This Policy will be executed across the denomination in Northern Ireland through a series of procedures.

This Policy is displayed at each local congregation.

Provision of alternative formats, when necessary, for example, large print or easy read versions, can be accessed via PCI Safeguarding Office.

(e) **Review**

This Policy will be reviewed every three years by Council for Social Witness. Changes will be reported to the General Assembly, with the Assembly being asked to approve any significant policy changes.

If there is a legislative change that requires the Policy to be updated

or reviewed within that time period, this will be the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness. Where this is urgent, the General Council can act on behalf of the General Assembly to approve a significant policy change. The Safeguarding Lead will advise them if this is the case.

Accompanying procedure will be reviewed at least every three years by the Safeguarding Development Committee, Council for Social Witness, as well as at any point there are legislative/good practice updates required.

Procedural changes will be reported to the Council for Social Witness, with the Council being asked to approve any significant procedural changes.

It is the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness, to ensure changes are communicated in a timely and effective manner to the denomination.

Policy End

APPENDIX 5

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND REPUBLIC OF IRELAND CHILD SAFEGUARDING

1. Policy

(a) Policy Statement

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland believes that everyone has a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and to keep them safe.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland believes that children should never experience abuse of any kind.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland is committed to safeguarding all children and protecting them from harm.

It is the policy of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to safeguard all children and young people interacting with its ministry in any form. This includes actively protecting children from all forms of harm or abuse.

The denomination demonstrates and achieves this by providing this policy and accompanying procedures, for all involved in youth and children's work and any form of children or youth ministry within the denomination, to ensure that children and young people enjoy their engagement with our denomination, free from the threat of abuse and in a safe environment.

(b) Biblical basis for Safeguarding

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland determines first and foremost that we have a biblical imperative for safeguarding.

Safeguarding is imperative for our denomination and a central component to our mission; when we do it well, we are proclaiming the excellencies of our Lord Jesus.

It is therefore our duty to use the Bible as our reference point, where we find guidance in how to safeguard others as part of, not only our legal and ethical duty, but as who we are as a denomination at heart.

For example;

- love our neighbour as ourselves, (Lev 19:18 / Luke 10:27 / Gal 5:13–15)
- treat others as we would want to be treated (Matt 7:12)
- meet the needs of others (Romans 15:1–2 / Philippians 2:3–4)
- seek justice and correct oppression (Psalm 89:14 / Isaiah 1:17 / Micah 6:8)

- protecting the weak and those in need (Psalm 82:3-4/ Matt 18:10)

(c) **Legal Context**

This policy and accompanying procedures have been developed with the following legislation and guidance documents considered, which all seek to protect and safeguard children;

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Children First Act 2015
- Child Safeguarding: A Guide for Policy, Procedure and Practice 2018 (Tusla)
- Child Care Act 1991
- Protection for Persons Reporting Child Abuse Act 1998
- Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs)
- Criminal Justice Act, 2006
- Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012
- National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts, 2012 – 2016
- Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017
- Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook 2011 (Health Service Executive)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

(d) **Core Principles**

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland engages with children and young people throughout the island of Ireland and welcomes those from households where there is no Presbyterian or other denominational connection.

The welfare of any child is paramount, no matter how brief their engagement with our denomination or small the organisation they attend.

All children, regardless of age, disability, gender, racial heritage, religious belief, sexual orientation or identity, have the right to equal protection from all forms of harm or abuse.

We recognise some children are additionally vulnerable because of the impact of previous experiences, communication needs, disabilities, adverse environments and other issues.

The voices of children and young people are crucial to our learning and development as a safe denomination and we seek to always improve our engagement with them.

Children First, National Guidance for the protection and welfare of children (*Children First Act 2015, National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*), highlights the following key principles:

- The safety and wellbeing of children is everyone's responsibility
- The best interests of the child should be paramount
- The overall aim in all dealings with children and their families is to intervene proportionately to support families and keep children safe from harm
- Children have the right to be heard, listened to and taken seriously. Taking account of their age and understanding, they should be consulted and involved in all matters and decisions that may affect their lives.
- Prevention and intervention to keep children safe from harm is critical
- Partnership and cooperation, particularly with statutory services, are required
- Parents/guardians have a right to respect and should be consulted and involved in matters that concern their family

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland will therefore;

1. Ensure that every congregation has an aligned Designated Liaison Person
2. Maintain robust procedures for the recruitment, checking and monitoring of staff and volunteers working with children
3. Ensure that anyone engaging with children and young people through the denomination will be trained at least once every three years in how to recognise, respond to and report abuse as well as understand their role in the prevention of abuse
4. Ensure the denomination has clear processes for the reporting of abuse and the risk of harm, both externally to statutory services and internally through a clearly identified chain of responsibility
5. Ensure that identified risks to children and young people are assessed and managed
6. Ensure that any person of risk engaged in our ministries (for example those with a history of serious offending behaviour) is safely managed, monitored and supported
7. Ensure that we have a timely, effective and sensitive approach to managing non-recent abuse disclosures
8. Ensure that children and young people from other countries are protected and cared for while engaging in our ministries and missions

9. Ensure we have appropriate and actual methods for children and young people to voice their opinions and concerns, and be listened and responded to
10. Ensure we have safe and confidential methods for managing information

This Policy will be executed across the denomination in Republic of Ireland through a series of procedures.

This Policy and the Child Safeguarding Statement are displayed at each local congregation.

Provision of alternative formats, when necessary, for example, large print or easy read versions, can be accessed via PCI Safeguarding Office.

(e) **Review**

This Policy will be reviewed every three years by Council for Social Witness. Changes will be reported to the General Assembly, with the Assembly being asked to approve any significant policy changes.

If there is a legislative change that requires the Policy to be updated or reviewed within that time period, this will be the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness. Where this is urgent, the General Council can act on behalf of the General Assembly to approve a significant policy change. The Safeguarding Lead will advise them if this is the case.

Accompanying procedure will be reviewed at least every three years by the Safeguarding Development Committee, Council for Social Witness, as well as at any point there are legislative/good practice updates required.

Procedural changes will be reported to the Council for Social Witness, with the Council being asked to approve any significant procedural changes.

It is the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness, to ensure changes are communicated in a timely and effective manner to the denomination.

Policy End

APPENDIX 6

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND CRIMINAL VETTING CHECKS POLICY

1. Policy

(a) Policy Statement

Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) is a faith-based body that is required to ensure appropriate and adequate recruitment and criminal vetting checks for all persons working or volunteering with children and/or adults at risk of harm.

As part of the ethos of safeguarding all who come in contact with our mission and ministries, it is mandatory that all relevant volunteers and employees of the individual congregations and Presbyteries are checked, prior to commencing roles and regularly thereafter.

This policy applies to all volunteers, leaders, officers and employees in congregations and associated ministries in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

This Policy applies across the island of Ireland; both jurisdictions require appropriate vetting measures which are further defined for each jurisdiction in the accompanying procedures.

This policy therefore covers both ACCESS NI, the Northern Ireland criminal records checking process and National Vetting Bureau (NVB), the Republic of Ireland criminal records checking process.

This policy does not apply to Council for Social Witness Care Services staff, or Assembly Buildings employees. See PCI Human Resources Policy, Recruitment and Selection.

(b) Legal and Policy Context

- AccessNI Criminal Record Checks, Part V of the Police Act 1997
- Schedule 1 National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland Child Safeguarding (NI) Policy / Child Safeguarding (ROI) Policy / Adult Safeguarding (NI) Policy / Adult Safeguarding (ROI) Policy

(c) Core principles

Criminal vetting checks are a critical part of safe recruitment procedures for all roles that will give access to children, young people and /or adults at risk of harm.

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland recognizes that the scope of mission and ministry across the denomination is wide, and there are a variety of relevant roles that are applicable under this policy. For example, this could include;

- Ministers (student ministers / active / retired if continuing to engage in a pastoral role)
- Auxiliary Ministers
- Elders
- Deaconesses
- Leaders / helpers / volunteers
- Youth / family workers
- Additional pastoral personnel

This is not an exhaustive list of applicable roles; the denomination uses a wide range of designations and job titles. Each role can be individually assessed if applicable for a criminal vetting check against the relevant criteria.

No one may commence a relevant role until the check process is completed and a Presbytery cannot install a minister/elder until the check process is completed.

“Decisions on the suitability for recruitment rest at all times with the recruiting organisation and the result of vetting should form only one part of the recruitment decision.” (*Chapter 4, National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, Children First 2015*).

Therefore, PCI understands that a proper appointment procedure is one of the most effective ways of assessing a person’s suitability to work with children and young people, or adults at risk of harm, and may act as a deterrent to potential abusers. We must do all that we can to ensure that anyone who may be unsuitable for working with children, young people or adults is not given the opportunity to become a leader. The criminal vetting procedure is only one aspect of this full process.

This policy is accompanied by a set of procedures that establish how this policy will function across the denomination and all the identified roles.

(d) **Review**

This Policy will be reviewed every three years by Council for Social Witness. Changes will be reported to the General Assembly, with the Assembly being asked to approve any significant policy changes.

If there is a legislative change that requires the Policy to be updated or reviewed within that time period, this will be the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness. Where this is urgent, the General Council can act on behalf of the General Assembly to approve a significant policy change. The Safeguarding Lead will advise them if this is the case.

Accompanying procedure will be reviewed at least every three years by the Safeguarding Development Committee, Council for Social Witness, as well as at any point there are legislative/good practice updates required.

Procedural changes will be reported to the Council for Social Witness, with the Council being asked to approve any significant procedural changes.

It is the responsibility of the Council for Social Witness, to ensure changes are communicated in a timely and effective manner to the denomination.

Policy end

THE TRUSTEES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

Chairman: Rev Dr D. WATTS

Secretary: Mr K. SWARBRICK

1. Trust Funds

A summary of the various Trust Funds the Trustees manage is included in the 2024 Accounts Book.

The Trust Funds in the table below are distributed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Trustees and, as in 2024, the Trustees have agreed to recommend to the 2025 General Assembly that where the terms of Trust permit, these should be distributed via the United Appeal rather than directly to various agencies.

The following recommendations are made to General Assembly:

Fund	Income	Proposal for Distribution
Mrs A.M. Davidson	£8,411.70	United Appeal
William V. McCleery	£43,917.72	Central Ministry Fund (80%) Assembly Buildings repair fund (20%)
Ida Mary McGeown	£5,839.68	United Appeal
Irene Scott	£9,099.42	United Appeal
Victor Morrow	£1,903.44	United Appeal

2. The Presbyterian Church Investment Fund (known as The General Investment Fund)

The General Investment Fund (GIF) was established under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 1964. It is a Common Investment Fund in which any charity connected with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland can invest. Investments in the Fund tend to arise from trust funds, bequests or donations which often have particular terms or restrictions attached regarding the application of the capital and income. Further details about the fund, the investment performance and investment holdings, are contained in a booklet available from the Financial Secretary's Department.

As reported to General Assembly 2023, the Trustees were invited by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland to apply to have the GIF formally registered as a charity – the application was approved in August 2023. Accordingly, Trustees must now file the 2024 annual report and accounts with the Charity Commission.

The Trustees are responsible for the annual accounts of the GIF. These will be prepared by the Financial Secretary's Department, audited by the General Assembly's newly appointed auditors and included in the published PCI Accounts when available. The accounts will provide additional information regarding the Fund, in particular its performance, investment allocation, level of income and distributions during the year.

Declaration of Dividend	31.03.24	30.09.24
No shares qualifying	6,074,096	6,043,897
Dividend per share	15.0p	18.0p

During 2024, £148,873 was transferred from the Dividend Equalisation Reserve, which is in accordance with the Scheme Rules, and the balance on the Reserve at 31 December, 2024 is £499,252. The combined annual dividend of 33p per share for 2024 is 27% higher than previous years (26p per share for 2023, 27p per share for 2022).

	31 Dec 2024	31 Dec 2023
Valuation of Investments	83,647,336	80,510,722
Cash Balance	233,391	-591,453
Dividend Equalisation Reserve	499,252	648,125
	84,379,979	80,567,394
No of Shares Issued	6,045,562	6,045,488
Share Value	£13.957	£13.3269

The shares in the Fund are valued on a monthly basis and the monthly share prices are included in the accounts. The share value at 31 Dec 2024 was £13.957 per share (2023: £13.3269).

3. Investment Manager to the General Investment Fund

As reported to General Assembly 2023, following an appointment exercise, CCLA was appointed as the Investment Manager for the GIF in April 2023. As an ongoing element of that transfer, the custodian of the investment funds was also updated on 1 Oct 2024, as the investments were transferred to a new firm called 'SEI Investments (Europe) Ltd'.

CCLA provide secretarial services to the Church Investors Group (CIG), a group which represents church investors from many mainstream denominations and church-related charities. Its aims are:

- to encourage the formulation of investment policies based on Christian ethical principles
- to encourage responsible business practice through engagement with company management
- to share information and views on ethical matters related to investment.

The CIG has 67 members, predominantly drawn from the UK and Ireland, with combined investment assets of over £26bn.

The Trustees were impressed by CIG and are recommending to the General Assembly that PCI should become a member.

4. Crescent Loan Fund

The Crescent Loan Fund was established to provide low interest loans to congregations having short term financial problems. The interest charged on new loans is half of 'the bank base rate plus 2%' and this is charged on the average balance outstanding over the term of the loan.

The maximum loan normally provided by the Fund is £50,000 and the normal term is 3 years, however loans of up to 5 years can be provided at the discretion of the Trustees. Further information about loans from the Fund is available from the Financial Secretary's Department.

During 2024 the Trustees provided new loans to 2 congregations totalling £70k and the loan balance outstanding at 31 December 2024 was £159,500. At that time the fund had £250k available to meet new loan requests.

5. Bequests

The Trustees received a report of all bequests notified to the Church during 2024 and wish to record their deep gratitude for those who have decided to support the Church in this way.

6. Trustee Appointments & Resignations

At the 2025 General Assembly Revs Jim Stothers and David Johnston will have completed their first term of office, having been appointed in 2020. Both have expressed a willingness to continue for a further term and resolutions proposing the reappointment of both individuals were agreed at the Trustees' AGM. The Trustees wish to record their thanks to Jim and David both for their previous service and for their willingness to continue for a further term of office.

COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Convener: Rev DANIEL KANE

Council Secretary: Rev TREVOR GRIBBEN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Public Affairs seeks to demonstrate the power, truth and beauty of the Gospel across a wide range of highly contentious moral and ethical areas of public life. Influencing public policy decisions by advocating for Gospel-inspired values, and ethical considerations in legislative and governance processes is at the heart of much of what the Council does.
2. The Council is tasked with helping to develop the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's thinking on current issues and communicating the General Assembly's views in the public square. It also works hard at developing relationships with legislators and decision makers on the island of Ireland, making representations to them on behalf of the Church, and responding to various public consultations. As a council, it is also committed to pursuing appropriate and mutually beneficial partnerships with other PCI councils and external bodies, as well as developing a public theology which empowers it to have robust, biblically informed and compassionate, outward facing engagement.
3. The Council for Public Affairs has met in-person on two occasions since last year's General Assembly, with its committee, panels and task groups also meeting in person and via MS Teams. The report below summarises the work of the Council's committee and panels over the period August 2024–March 2025.
4. The Council is thankful to God to have Dr Rebecca Stevenson (or Bex as she prefers to be known) serving the Church as its Public Affairs Officer. It prays that her gifts will continue to be fruitful in serving God through its gracious, confident Gospel engagement in the public square. May love “abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment” (Philippians 1:9) in her life and may she never cease to be thrilled with the truth we find uniquely in Jesus.
5. It is also deeply indebted to the Rev Trevor Gribben, Clerk of the General Assembly, who is Secretary to the Council. His wise words, seasoned with wisdom and grace, are a constant source of guidance and inspiration as the Council seeks to demonstrate the power, truth and beauty of the Gospel across a wide range of highly contentious moral and ethical areas of public life. It offers him its warmest congratulations on his nomination to the position of Moderator of the General Assembly and assures him of its prayerful and practical support throughout his year of office.

6. The Council has responded to a range of public consultations and calls for evidence over this time period. These are available to view on the PCI website, and a list of submissions made since August 2024 is shown in Appendix 1. For information, there is a copy of PCI's submission to the 'Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill: Call for evidence' included as Appendix 2.

STATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

7. The Committee expresses thanks to all those involved in education in the past year: governors, school leaders, teachers, classroom assistants and support staff. It encourages congregations to continue to engage positively with their local schools.

Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC)

8. Concerning education matters in Northern Ireland, the State Education Committee continues to work closely with our educational partners in the Church of Ireland and Methodist Church through the Transferor Representatives' Council. PCI is represented by Dr Andy Brown, Dr Rebecca Stevenson (Public Affairs Officer), Mr John Wilkinson OBE and Rev Robert Herron OBE. After many years of service, Rev Dr Colin McClure has stood down as a PCI representative on the TRC; he is thanked for his service, especially for his contribution to Religious Education. Thanks are also due to Dr Andy Brown for his service as the Chair of the TRC. Dr Brown has been a tireless ambassador for the cause of local church engagement in schools and has represented the TRC in meetings with Ministers of Education, elected representatives, departmental officials, statutory bodies and other organisations.
9. The Transferor Churches regularly meet with representatives of the Catholic trustees to share views on issues of mutual interest and concern.
10. In Judicial Review 87 (October 2023), the applicants argued that the Christian-focused religious education (RE) and collective worship (CW) in controlled primary schools in Northern Ireland was contrary to the religious freedom provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The Court found in favour of the applicants.
11. The Department of Education appealed, and the Transferor Churches intervened. The Court of Appeal (April 2024) upheld the trial judge's 'important conclusion' that the curriculum was not conveyed in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner. However, the Court also held that there had been no breach of rights because parents had an unqualified statutory right to have their child excused wholly or partly from attendance at RE and/or CW.
12. Judicial Review 87 has been sent to the Supreme Court and the case has been listed for 21 and 22 May 2025. The TRC member churches have decided to intervene.

Reconstitution of Boards of Governors

13. During the past year, school boards of governors have been reconstituted across Northern Ireland. The Church is grateful to all who have served as transferor representatives during the past four-year term (plus an additional year) and thanks those who have stepped up to serve for the next four years.

Education Authority board membership

14. Since the establishment of the Education Authority, the Transferor Churches (Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian) have each had one seat on the Board, with a fourth seat that rotates between the Church of Ireland and PCI.
15. John Wilkinson, former principal of Dromore High School and elder in First Dromore congregation, and Catherine Chambers, a solicitor and member of Bloomfield congregation, have been appointed to serve for the next four years.
16. Rev Robert Herron has been the PCI representative on the Education Authority since its inception in 2015, and he is thanked for his contribution.

Minister's proposal to form a Managing Authority for Controlled Schools

17. After two years of work, the Independent Review of Education panel published its final report in December 2023. It is a comprehensive report with many recommendations.
18. In the report the panel notes the perception of controlled school leaders that “the Education Authority is stretched too thin and is conflicted by servicing all school types, leaving controlled schools relatively unsupported.” The panel describes the support arrangements for controlled schools as “sub-optimal”.
19. In response, the Minister of Education set up a Taskforce with representation from the Controlled Schools’ Support Council, the Department of Education, and the Education Authority to develop a proposed model of support for controlled schools, including a dedicated body to include managing authority responsibility. Chaired by Mark Baker, Chief Executive Officer of the Controlled Schools Support Council, the Taskforce reported to the Minister in December 2024 and recommends a phased approach to delivering the requirements of the Minister’s Terms of Reference:
 - (a) A Controlled Schools Unit established within the Education Authority: This is an interim collaborative model designed to facilitate the delivery of tangible improvements for controlled schools in the short-to medium-term whilst concurrently commencing preparations for a dedicated standalone body for controlled schools.
 - (b) A Managing Authority for Controlled Schools: A dedicated body with managing authority responsibilities developed to provide focused governance and strategic leadership for controlled schools.

This model will require legislation to transfer identified duties and functions.

20. The Church supports the Minister's initiative in the context of ensuring there is equitable and consistent service provision across all sectors and that "Every child and young person is happy, learning and succeeding" (DE Vision Statement).

Special educational needs reform

21. In February 2025, the Department of Education published the Special Education Needs Reform Agenda and the accompanying Delivery Plan 2025–2030.
22. The case for reform is set out in four assertions:
 - (a) Children with SEN do not always enjoy the same educational experiences and outcomes as their peers
 - (b) Children, parents and practitioners lack confidence in the existing system of provision to meet children's needs
 - (c) The Schools Estate is struggling to keep pace with the changing profile of our pupil population
 - (d) Special Educational Needs investment is on an unsustainable trajectory
23. The programme of reform aims to rebuild confidence and trust with parents, build capability across the workforce, improve the approach to placements, focus on child-centred communications and a more child-centred approach to support. The delivery plan lists actions that are needed "to ensure that children and young people with SEN can benefit from greater inclusion and receive the right support from the right people at the right time and in the right place".
24. The Minister acknowledges this is an ambitious programme of reform of services and provision to support children and young people with special educational needs.
25. The State Education Committee will consider the SEN Reform programme in more detail when it meets in the autumn.

Mini-Inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education

26. The NI Assembly Committee for Education has carried out a Mini-Inquiry into Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in schools. Dr Rebecca Stevenson, Public Affairs Officer, drafted a response on behalf of PCI.

Jointly Managed Church Schools

27. In April 2015, the Department of Education published the circular "Jointly Managed Schools" as "an information guide for those stakeholders interested in establishing jointly managed schools". The State Education Committee has received an 'Ethos and First Steps' document prepared by representatives of the Transferor Churches and the Catholic Church. The

Committee has agreed to support the TRC in exploring the possibility of Jointly Managed Church Schools.

Strategic review of the Northern Ireland curriculum

28. In March 2025, the Department of Education published TransformED NI, a comprehensive strategy for the transformation of teaching and learning in Northern Ireland. The strategy focuses on the core areas of curriculum, assessment, qualifications, school improvement and tackling educational disadvantage. The strategy is based on a Ten Point Plan for educational excellence in Northern Ireland. While acknowledging that Religious Education is not included in the review, the TRC is taking this opportunity that such a review brings to raise the importance of RE in the NI curriculum and the need to work with policy makers to agree a curriculum refresh for the teaching of RE.

ROBERT HERRON, Convener

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION PANEL

29. The Panel has continued to prioritise the work of ‘Considering Grace: Presbyterians in the Troubles,’ in particular the Panel has been advancing the work on the follow up resource which was reported at the last General Assembly.
30. This project, ‘Considering Grace Psalmody’ is an opportunity for the church to continue to listen to and lament what has passed with the purpose of shaping a future that offers safe spaces for healing that is Kingdom-centered, by providing PCI with an opportunity to offer healing and repair around issues which have led to division and conflict, to confess complicity and reorient worshipping communities towards a healthy, reconciled and peaceful society.
31. The newly composed songs will provide helpful structures for working through the tears of lament whilst reorienting our gaze towards God’s sovereign purposes. Lament is currently under-utilized and rarely understood. These new songs offer habit shaping patterns for worship that allow for grief, anger and regret to be honestly expressed in the public domain. The project will produce a suite of 8–10 songs based on texts from the Psalms that are suitable for congregational singing. They will be published digitally on a website and in booklets.
32. This project has involved convening eight geographically based focus groups, each of which has studied a Psalm of Lament. As the Psalms are read and studied, the themes that emerge have been noted by the song writer, with the view to encouraging every group to consider what the collective vision for the future is, so that pain is held in the space of lament to God and not passed on to future generations. The groups were then reconvened a second time to hear the drafts of songs that have been composed and invited to offer feedback and input.

33. The participants for the focus groups have been composed of Presbyterians impacted by the Troubles Conflict in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, as well as some of those who were involved during the composition of the 'Considering Grace' book. For this project we have also invited a younger person, who does not have lived experience of the conflict but grew up in a family or community that was impacted, and a member of the nationalist community has also been invited to share their perspective.
34. It is expected that the project will be completed between September 2025 and February 2026. The Panel has applied to the Reconciliation Fund for the funding for the recording studio, musicians and launch which will take place in Assembly buildings Belfast.
35. Throughout the past year there have been a number of engagements with the PSNI both centrally and locally. These have provided opportunities to raise issues of concern as well as recognising areas of positive working relationships, with the Public Affairs Officer and the Very Rev Dr Charles McMullen attending the Reference, Engagement and Listening (REaL) event in February 2025.
36. The Panel has also kept a watching brief on developments with the Legacy Act working with the ICC and the Church Leaders Group.

TONY DAVIDSON, Convener

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND PANEL

37. The Panel has continued to meet to consider matters in the public square pertaining to the Republic of Ireland. This has included matters relating to education, the Dáil election, and the ongoing impacts of the 'mica scandal.'
38. Education has continued to be a significant focus of discussion for the Panel. This has included discussions regarding the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum; extending the free book scheme to Protestant fee-paying schools; and issues surrounding Special Educational Needs (SEN) and SEN provision. The Panel has continued to work with the SEC as many of the challenges experienced by schools in Northern Ireland are also shared by schools in the Republic.
39. The Panel has continued to monitor the mica scandal and the ongoing negative impacts that this is having on those affected. Following the Dáil election, the Panel wrote to the newly elected Minister for Housing, James Browne TD, to highlight that manse and other clergy properties have been excluded from the redress scheme and request that this be reviewed.
40. The Panel has been made aware of the challenges that some PCI congregations are having trying to navigate the planning system in Ireland, when they are renovating old church buildings. It has begun the process of identifying opportunities to raise awareness of this issue in the public square.

41. Following the 2024 election, the Panel has begun the process of identifying future areas of work through the Programme for Government. This includes:
- **Forum for Education:** Ensuring PCI's participation in the proposed forum for Education;
 - **Palliative Care:** Affirming the work of Palliative Care; and advocating for more funding and wider availability of services;
 - **Asylum Process:** Working in collaboration with the Public Engagement Task Group to make a positive and practical contribution to the confused information environment around immigration and the asylum process.

WILLIAM HAYES, Convener

HUMAN DIGNITY PANEL

42. The Panel has continued to monitor major developments relating to the proposed ban on Conversion Therapy Practices. In March 2024, the Panel made a submission to the Consultation on the Alliance Party website relating to the proposed private members' bill introduced by Eóin Tennyson MLA (see Appendix 3). Following the recent developments on this issue, the Panel has decided to establish a task group to bring forward a coherent and compassionate biblical approach to this sensitive pastoral issue for the General Assembly's consideration and approval in due course.
43. The Panel has also been considering how it can be 'upstream,' and identify future areas of interest. The increasing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in many areas of life including employment, healthcare and the criminal justice system, is a matter which the Panel has been exploring with the intention of hosting a conference to examine this issue in greater detail. The Panel is currently discussing this with Chaplains at Queen's University Belfast and the Ulster University to see if they would like to collaborate with PCI in this venture.

JOHN MULLAN, Convener

ASSISTED SUICIDE/EUTHANASIA TASK GROUP REPORT

44. On 25 March 2025, the Isle of Man became the first place in the British Isles to pass assisted suicide legislation through its parliament. Under its proposals, adults with less than 12 months to live who have lived on the Island for at least five years will be able to end their own lives. It is expected to become law later this year and the service could be up and running by 2027.

45. November 29 2024, marked another water-shed moment when the Westminster Parliament took the monumental decision to progress Kim Leadbeater's "Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill." This Bill attempts to legalise assisted suicide for terminally ill adults within certain constraints in England and Wales. The passing of the Bill has the real potential to initiate a paradigm shift across these islands in how we as a society understand, value and protect the sacredness of every human life. While there are many legal hurdles still to cross as the Bill progresses through its various stages at Westminster and any new service will not come into force for many years to come, we should not underestimate the Rubicon that has been crossed. The issues are more nuanced than the headlines, frequently used euphemisms and political sound bites want us to believe. The public debate around the issue has been heated and emotive and the language used has often been more focused on winning arguments rather than the need to ensure that people get compassionate and proper care at the end of life. A key amendment currently being considered at the Committee stage relates to expert panels deciding on applications after High Court judge scrutiny was dropped from the proposed legislation. The Bill is expected to return to the House of Commons, possibly towards the end of April or in May 2025, for further debate and another vote by all MPs. The Task Group believe this is a bad Bill, implemented in a bad way.
46. On 17 October, 2024, in the Republic of Ireland, the Oireachtas debated a motion proposed by the Joint Committee on Assisted Dying and voted to take note of the final report; this has no legal effect but the Committee report recommended legislative change. This vote was far from conclusive, demonstrating a clear divide on this fundamental and sensitive issue. Whilst there is a committed core group of activists in the newly formed coalition government in the Republic of Ireland, assisted suicide is not listed in the current Programme for Government.
47. As a denomination, PCI wants to be a voice of hope in this deeply polarising debate. It has consistently opposed the introduction of legislation that allows assisted suicide/euthanasia in either jurisdiction, however minimal its scope. It has a clearly stated and settled position on this matter based on our understanding of what the Scriptures and PCI's confessional standards teach and has consistently affirmed the importance and innate dignity of every human life from conception to death. Humanity cannot do what it feels 'fit' with these matters. Irrespective of ill-health, dementia, disability, mental health, terminal diagnosis or any other attribute or circumstance a person finds themselves in, that person's innate value and dignity does not change in the sight of God. The preservation, protection, and dignity of human life are moral imperatives and precious values that cannot, and should not, be altered by legislative change. Furthermore, Christian hope is profoundly focused on victory over sin and death and is brought to its climax in and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Bible teaches uniquely that God himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, experienced suffering on the cross for us and he is our only hope both in life and in death.

48. The Task Group also believes that it would be extremely difficult to legislate well for assisted suicide/euthanasia given the complexities involved. Additionally, it has deep concerns about the good quality delivery of such services once we cross this Rubicon. Along with others, it firmly believes that no number of legal safeguards can ensure the safety of the most vulnerable in society and protect them from emotional coercion, or the very feeling that they are now a burden to their family. We should be protecting people's lives and advocating for a better way, not speeding up death and devaluing life. Furthermore, it believes there is a better way and it will continue to call for the governments in both jurisdictions to prioritise the mainstreaming, investing in, and strengthening of well-resourced palliative care services that support those who are nearing the end of their lives across this island. For all concerned, it believes that this is the most compassionate way forward, not just physically, but mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Where personal autonomy and individual choice often drive the debate, we should remember that we were created for dependence, not self-sufficiency.
49. The Task Group wants to mobilise and equip every member within PCI and the wider community to engage with this on-going debate in a way which is Bible-based, well informed, compassionate and nuanced. The 'Living and Dying Well' resource hub on the PCI website has been specifically designed to facilitate this goal. Along with others, the Task Group is working hard to produce Bible-based and life-affirming resources to be used as widely as possible in congregations e.g. at midweeks, small groups, prayer times, etc. The contents of this HUB will be kept under constant review and added to as it responds to the changing challenges in this debate.
50. Two letters were sent from the Task Group to all ministers and congregations (4 November 2024 and 18 December 2024) i.e. before and after the Westminster debate on Kim Leadbeater's Bill. These letters clearly set out our Biblical and settled position on assisted suicide/euthanasia and asked ministers to make them available to every member in their congregation along with the plea that this situation be made a priority for urgent prayer. Each letter also encouraged members to write to local MPs, TDs, Senators or member of the House of Lords calling on both the Irish and UK governments to prioritise investment in and the provision of the best possible palliative care in the UK and Ireland with the utmost urgency.
51. A submission was made to the NI Health Committee's call for evidence on the Current Provision of Palliative and End of Life Care Services in Northern Ireland on behalf of the denomination.¹ Individuals with a lived experience of the provision of and access to Palliative Hospice Care were also encouraged to respond to this call for evidence. In light of this, a Briefing Paper was prepared for the NI Executive published on 7 March 2025 which concludes that the challenges to Northern Ireland's Palliative and End of Life Care (PEOLC) services are "multifaceted and interconnected. From funding constraints and workforce shortages

to geographical inequities and data deficiencies, these issues require a comprehensive and coordinated approach to address them. While progress has been made in many areas by the Palliative Care in Partnership (PCiP) programme, significant work remains to ensure equitable, high-quality PEOLC services for all residents of Northern Ireland.” Regarding funding and sustainability the briefing paper states that “Northern Ireland’s PEOLC services face significant funding constraints, with a 50/50 statutory/voluntary funding model leading to variable access and service provision across the HSC Trusts. The reliance on multiple funding streams, including the Department of Health, HSC Trusts, and voluntary sector, creates a complex commissioning landscape.”²

52. The current palliative care funding model in NI relies largely on charitable donations and fundraising, with Hospice NI reporting that 30% of its service costs are covered by government, relying on goodwill and the generosity of voluntary donations and other fundraising activities for most of their income. There is also significant investment from Macmillan Cancer Support. This model of funding is unsustainable, insufficient and inequitable as it fails to provide financial stability and prevents hospices from maintaining services, retaining skilled staff, and fostering innovation. There is a crying need to ensure stability and sustainability of long-term funding to allow planning service developments as well as for the alignment of resources with community profiles to ensure the best distribution of resources.
53. A resolution calling on the NI Executive to bring forward a Palliative Care Strategy underpinned by a Palliative Care policy for NI with the utmost urgency is appended. This should involve extensive consultation with carers’ and patients’ groups along with consultation with independent sector care providers, statutory bodies and representatives of churches and other faith communities who can advise on the importance of meeting spiritual needs at this time of life – something that is currently recognised by NHS England. Alongside this, given that no legal requirement for palliative care commissioning exists in NI, unlike in England and Wales, a further resolution calls on the NI Executive to introduce the necessary legislative change to place the provision of palliative care in NI on a statutory footing.
54. In the Republic of Ireland palliative care provision is inconsistent, with huge swathes of the Midlands (an area as big as NI) having little or no provision at all. This situation also needs to be addressed urgently. The task group is encouraged by the inclusion of Palliative care in the Programme for Government. We call on the Irish government to ensure that the new policy on palliative care for children is delivered with expediency, along with a review of funding palliative care; and a commitment to ensure that palliative care services are made available across the entire region.
55. Following the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer’s October 2024 budget, there is massive concern over the hugely detrimental impact that proposals

2 Dr Grainne Crealey, Current Provision of Palliative and End of Life Care Services in Northern Ireland NIAR-277-2024 Date 07/03/2025 www.niassembly.gov.uk

contained in the contentious 'National Insurance Contributions Bill' will have on hospices and cancer charities across the UK of Great Britain and NI. It is estimated that the Bill could cost UK hospices up to thirty million pounds next year. The Council for Public Affairs wrote to the Chancellor expressing its grave concern regarding the negative impact this increase will have and calling for the exemption from the proposed increases to employer's national insurance contribution to be extended to care homes and hospices in line with other areas of the NHS. Recently on 25 March 2025, amendments tabled at Westminster to create such exemptions for health and social care providers were rejected. A resolution calling on locally elected Northern Ireland MPs to mitigate the detrimental effects these proposed changes would have on end-of-life care, and across other areas of social care in their jurisdiction, is appended.

56. Going forward plans are being progressed to produce a number of videos/podcasts for use in congregational settings e.g. midweeks, home Bible study groups, evening services, etc. The resources will explore some of the terminology and technicalities around assisted suicide and euthanasia, hear from PCI members, ministers, chaplains, and others who have experience of end-of life care, set out PCI's clear biblical and settled position on assisted suicide and euthanasia, and consider ways that the members can be involved proactively in supporting palliative care.

DANIEL KANE, Convener

WELFARE AND WELLBEING PANEL

57. The Panel reconvened in January 2025, with the Public Affairs Officer acting as interim convener. During that meeting, the Panel engaged in a broad discussion, which unsurprisingly included areas of concerns such as poverty, the impact of the cost of living, homelessness, concerns about mental health provision. Following the meeting, the Panel has decided to select two areas of focus, such as poverty and mental health support, to undertake an in-depth review with which to establish a biblical and compassionate approach to these issues for General Assembly's consideration in due course.
58. The Panel expresses its thanks to Mr Mark Baillie who stepped down after convening the Panel since 2023.

REBECCA STEVENSON, Interim Convener

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TASK GROUP

59. The Task Group reconvened in 2025 in response to the increasing tension and unrest amongst migrant communities across this island, which was evidenced in the Summer of 2024. Its focus will be on migration, considering how the Church can effectively raise awareness on the issues surrounding this topic in the public square. Where appropriate this will include collaboration with other Councils to highlighting initiatives such as ‘Welcoming the Stranger.’
60. The Task Group thanks Rev Daniel Kane for convening the task group from 2022–2024 and welcomes the Very Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick who has taken over this responsibility.

JOHN KIRKPATRICK, Convener

PATNERSHIP WORKING

61. The Council for Public Affairs continues to collaborate with other PCI Councils as required, working with the Council for Social Witness in responding to relevant consultations and working with the Council for Mission in Ireland when attending meetings with the Minister for Communities.
62. Opportunities for inter-church engagement through the structures of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) continued on a range of issues including legacy.

APPENDIX 1

CONSULTATION RESPONSES AUGUST 2024 – MARCH 2025

Date	Title	Organisation	Type	Responder
October 2024	Consultation on Policy underpinning the Public Health Bill	NI Assembly Department for Health	Policy Consultation	Council for Public Affairs
November 2024	The Northern Ireland Assembly Draft Programme for Government 2024–2027: ‘Our Plan: Doing what Matter Most’ Public Consultation	Executive Office	Policy Consultation	Council for Public Affairs
November 2024	Mini Inquiry into Relationships and Sexuality Education	NI Assembly Committee for Education	Policy Consultation	State Education Committee on behalf of the Council for Public Affairs
January 2025	Access to Palliative Care Inquiry	NI Assembly Committee for Health	Policy Consultation	Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia Task Group in collaboration with the Council for Social Witness on behalf of the Council of Public Affairs
February 2025	Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill	UK Government - Public Bill Committee	Call for Evidence	Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia Task Group on behalf of the Council of Public Affairs
March 2025	Consultation on the Proposed Private Members Bill on Banning Conversion Therapy Practices	Alliance Party	Policy Consultation	Human Dignity Panel, on behalf of the Council for Public Affairs

APPENDIX 2

Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill: Call for evidence Submission from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland February 2025

Summary

1. Our Submission provides a brief overview of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, outlines our key concerns with the proposed Bill, the use of a private members' bill to introduce such a significant change and highlights the need to enhance the delivery of end-of-life care.

Introduction

2. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has over 190,000 members belonging to over 500 congregations across 19 Presbyteries throughout Ireland, north and south. The Council for Public Affairs is authorised by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to speak on behalf of PCI on matters of public policy. The Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia Task Group was established in response to the proposed legislative change on assisted dying in GB and the Republic of Ireland. Membership of the Task Group includes medical professionals who work in the field of palliative care and their experience has informed this response.
3. PCI through its Council for Social Witness (CSW) provides services that meet the World Health Organisation's (WHO) description of palliative care through care homes for older people (residential and nursing). The CSW operates two residential homes for people with disabilities in NI, supporting people with life-limiting conditions. Additionally, PCI has five residential homes which cater for older adults and one nursing home providing care to those in the later days of their lives.
4. As part of the mission and ministry of the PCI there are 27 Chaplains working in hospitals across Ireland providing spiritual guidance and pastoral care to both patients and their families.
5. As an all-island denomination PCI have consistently opposed the introduction of legislation that allows for assisted suicide/euthanasia in either jurisdiction. We have a clearly stated and settled position on this matter based on our understanding of what the Scriptures teach and our confessional standards i.e., that all life is a precious gift from God, with which we cannot do as we feel fit.

Insufficient Safeguards

6. When considering the specifics of the Bill, at PCI we are concerned that the Bill does not contain the safeguards necessary to ensure that vulnerable members of society including the terminally ill; the elderly; or those suffering from a chronic illness will be given adequate protection.

7. Timescale: The proposed Bill allows three weeks from requesting assisted suicide to the process being completed, this is a very short time frame and we are concerned that it fails to allow sufficient time for the necessary due diligence.
8. The Bill assumes that doctors have the ability to predict when a patient has six months or less to live. However, accurate prognostication is notoriously unreliable and professionals working in many medical disciplines, including oncology and geriatrics, have expressed grave concerns in this regard.
9. We are deeply concerned that the Bill may allow for abuse and exploitation of the sick and elderly people, as the proposed changes place so much weight on the determinations of doctors and judges. Additionally, the Bill fails to outline how pressure and coercion may be identified.
10. The British Geriatric Society has also raised concerns about the lack of safeguards within the proposed Bill stating, '[w]e have significant concerns about the lack of effective legal safeguards that would protect older people from unwarranted harm. The current language in the bill does not protect older people, especially considering the link between frailty and feeling a burden on others.'¹

Use of a Private Members' Bill

11. At PCI we are deeply concerned about the choice of a Private Members' Bill (PMB) to drive such significant legislative change. We believe that this Bill would have benefited significantly from more pre-legislative stages, this would have enhanced the quality of the debate and allowed Parliamentarians to systematically review the facts delivered by commissioned academics. Additionally, the nature of PMBs means that the proposer has an unduly large influence on the make-up of the Committee scrutinising the Bill.²
12. Additionally, we are concerned that the use of a PMB may result in a failure to ensure that all those impacted by any legislative change will have the opportunity to give evidence, as the BGS has stated, "*there is too much at stake to rush through a Bill of this magnitude without detailed scrutiny of its complexities and input from those who will be most affected.*"³

Current State of Palliative Care Services

13. There is a clear lack of understanding amongst both the public and healthcare workers about what constitutes good end of life care in all its aspects. This was evidenced during the Westminster debate on the proposed changes to the law on assisted suicide in November 2024, where many MPs seemed to regard Palliative Care Medicine as 'handholding with morphine.' Additionally, there is a common misconception that palliative care inpatient units are places where a person's life is deliberately

1 *The BGS pushes to provide oral evidence to Assisted Dying committee (31 January 2025)*

2 *Using a private member's bill to legislate on assisted dying lacks the necessary preparation for an informed debate (BMJ 2025)*

3 *The BGS pushes to provide oral evidence to Assisted Dying committee (31 January 2025)*

shortened. This is factually incorrect with evidence showing that palliative care often inadvertently extends life, and can improve quality of life.

14. In the UK, it is estimated that 90% of those who die would have benefitted from better palliative care, meaning that over 600,000 people each year require this provision of care, a figure that is likely to increase with an ageing population.⁴ The demand for palliative care in England and Wales is expected to increase to as much as 47% with the total cost of hospice provision to meet this demand estimated at £947 million per year over the next 10 years.⁵
15. Access to Palliative Care is not equally accessible to everyone in the UK and has been described by some as a ‘postcode lottery’, with recent data suggesting that services are patchy, in rural or deprived areas.⁶
16. This funding model is unsustainable, insufficient and inequitable. It fails to provide financial stability and prevents hospices from maintaining services, retaining skilled staff, and fostering innovation. It also forces unnecessary competition for limited funds, fragmenting care and hindering collaboration. Without multi-year budgets, long-term planning and meaningful service development are impossible, leaving clinical needs unmet and communities underserved.
17. There is a need to ensure stability of long-term funding to allow planning service developments, and alignment of resources with community profiles to ensure best distribution of resources. This will also enable enduring partnerships with other regional care providers. Additionally, hospices are adversely and disproportionately affected by the increased national insurance contributions announced in the 2024 autumn budget.

Conclusion

18. At PCI we believe it would be impossible to legislate well for assisted suicide/euthanasia given the complexities involved. Additionally, we have deep concerns about good quality delivery of such services once we cross this rubicon, and that this Bill will have a negative impact on the provision of good end of life care across the board.
19. We also believe that legal safeguards would not ensure the safety of the most vulnerable in society should there be a change to the law. Furthermore, we believe that governments should prioritise investment in, and provision of, the best possible palliative care in the UK and Ireland.
20. Finally, we would like to thank all of the MPs who spoke out opposing this Bill during its Second Reading, and also those who spoke in favour of protecting the vulnerable members of society.

4 *University of Birmingham, ‘Five Palliative Care priorities that need to be fixed in 2025 for assisted dying to work.’ (7 January 2025)*

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Ibid.*

APPENDIX 3

Response of the Council of Public Affairs of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to the public consultation on the proposed Private Members' Bill banning conversion therapy practices March 2025

Background

1. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has over 190,000 members belonging to over 500 congregations across 19 Presbyteries throughout Ireland, north and south. The Council for Public Affairs is authorised by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to speak on behalf of PCI on matters of public policy.
2. People in Northern Ireland, whatever their sexual orientation, should be able to live free from coercive practices designed to change their orientation, imposed upon them against their will. Coercive interventions with a view to changing an individual's sexual orientation against their will are wrong and, where current legislation does not adequately deal with these coercive practices, then it would be appropriate to consider introducing new laws.
3. PCI is of the strong opinion that existing laws are sufficient to deal with genuine cases of abuse or coercion, and that demands for a new specific law are motivated by activism that wants a broad 'speech crime' law to catch the everyday activities of church leaders and parents who do not affirm LGBTQ ideology. Legal reviews often reveal, however, that objectionable practices that activists say they wish to ban are, in fact, already illegal. Serious consideration ought to be given as to how individuals reporting genuine abuse can be better protected under existing law. The common theme is that what constitutes 'conversion therapy practices' is very difficult to define legally and risks criminalising innocent behaviour like praying or having a conversation.
4. In seeking to promote the dignity, autonomy and well-being of all, there should be freedom for any individual to seek support to live in accordance with their conscience, including where that is shaped and formed by their personal understanding of faith orthodoxy and holy texts. For many individuals within our society this is the Christian faith and the Bible, which offer an understanding of the context of human relationships within a framework intended to facilitate the flourishing of all in society. We further recognise that within a pluralist society there is a multiplicity of beliefs and faith traditions, including 'no-faith', and affirm the rights of every person to live in accordance with their beliefs. An outworking of this for those who are same-sex attracted and wish to live faithfully in the context of a biblical understanding of human relationships, is to abstain from sexual activity. Such a person may wish to receive pastoral care and support as they seek to live in this way. Without clarity around definitions there is a chance that an unintended consequence of a legislative ban on

conversion therapy practices might constitute unreasonable government interference in reasonable religious practices.

5. PCI offers the following comments and observations in response to MLA Eoin Tennyson's proposed legislative change banning conversion therapy practices, through a Private Members' Bill on behalf of the Alliance Party.

Defining Conversion Therapy Practices

6. The consultation document does not offer a clear and precise legal definition of what is meant by the term "conversion therapy practices" yet it goes on to set out new criminal and civil measures to end "conversion therapy practices". This is wholly unacceptable. PCI also feels very strongly that the term "conversion therapy practices" is hugely unhelpful as it is a vague, ill-defined term which is open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation.
7. There is currently no internationally accepted definition of 'conversion' or 'reparative' therapies. It would appear, though, that the working definition of the term 'conversion therapy practices' used in this consultation document is taken from the LGBTQI+ Strategy Expert Advisory Panel which defines 'conversion therapy practices' as 'techniques intended to change or suppress someone's sexual orientation or gender identity' noting that this can take many forms, 'ranging from pseudo-psychological treatments, aversion therapies, as well as practices that are religious based (such as 'healing prayer' or 'deliverance ministry.')'.
8. Additionally, the report states that the term 'conversion therapy practices' encompasses all medical, psychiatric, psychological, religious, cultural and any other interventions that seek to erase, repress, or change an individual's sexual orientation.
9. PCI is gravely concerned that these definitions fail to take account of, or make provision for, individuals who actively and honestly seek pastoral support and prayer from their minister/pastor. Legislative proposals, which would prevent a minister/pastor, or other leader in a faith context, fulfilling their pastoral duties responsibly and well ought to be rejected. Thresholds to prove coercion must be rigorous to prevent against spurious allegations, and the creation of a chilling effect for any Christian involved in pastoral care and discipleship.
10. As indicated earlier, PCI is clear that coercive interventions with a view to changing an individual's sexual orientation against their will, are wrong. Abusive and violent acts, including the use of drug treatments to limit and/or reverse sexual desire, or 'aversion therapies' such as electric shock (all of which have been sanctioned in state-run institutions in the past) are abhorrent. Provisions to tighten the law to ensure such practices are appropriately addressed through, for example, the proposal to introduce motivation by conversion therapy as a potential aggravating factor by a judge on sentencing, should be supported.

11. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland's concerns were summed up by the Rev Daniel Kane, convener of PCI's Council for Public Affairs, in a speech accepted by the 2024 General Assembly when he stated that any new law on conversion therapy practices, 'should not criminalise ministers, church workers and parents.' Mr Kane further explained, '*there is a grave risk of future legislation straying into the freedoms we have of proclaiming the uniqueness of Christ and freedom to practice our faith. The term conversion therapy continues to be a wide, ill-defined, umbrella term, covering all kinds of abusive practices which are largely already illegal.*' Concluding, he stated that, '*any future legislation shouldn't criminalise ministers, church workers and parents as they walk beside those who struggle with their sexuality, pastorally and prayerfully.*'
12. These remarks affirmed the position of the PCI in 2021, when the Very Rev Dr David Bruce, then Moderator of the General Assembly, opposed a similar motion brought before the NI Assembly saying, '*Conversion therapy is an unhelpful term which is defined differently by different people.*' He explained: "*Attempts to end same sex attraction by using drug treatments to limit and/or reverse sexual desire, or 'aversion therapies' such as electric shock treatment, (all of which have been sanctioned in state-run institutions in decades past), are utterly and entirely wrong.*" In conclusion he said, "*any forthcoming legislation regarding 'Conversion Therapy', Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights needs to be carefully considered, as it provides for freedom of thought, conscience and the practice and observance of religion... Legislation which prevents a minister or other leader fulfilling their pastoral duties responsibly and well, ought to be rejected.*"
13. There is also a need for any proposed new Bill to have legal safeguards to protect freedom of religion and freedom of speech. It is essential that any new Bill must not criminalise expressions of personal conviction (especially if they are made without expressions of hatred or intolerance, or improper purpose or coercion, or abuse of power.) We are deeply concerned that an unintended consequence of the adoption of a broad definition could result in the undermining of free speech and gospel freedom. It would be an absurdity if, under new legislation banning conversion therapy practices, a heterosexual person seeking prayer and guidance on their sexuality or sexual practice could receive them from their minister/pastor/priest and a homosexual person seeking the same could be leading that minister/pastor/priest into committing a prosecutable offence. A Bill that could also be used to criminalise any minister/pastor/priest teaching or communicating within the confines of a church building what is simply a mainstream Christian sex ethic would not be acceptable.

Use of a Private Members' Bill

14. At PCI we are concerned at the choice of a PMB to drive such significant legislative change. We urge the Bill sponsor to allow the Minister for Communities to bring forward an Executive Bill on an effective ban on conversion therapy practices before the end of the current Assembly mandate, per the Motion tabled on 4 June 2024.
15. Should the Bill sponsor continue with the course of action, PCI seeks reassurance that this Bill undertakes the same robust scrutiny that would be afforded to an Executive Bill; this should include a consultation from the relevant committee and scrutiny of the committee processes.

MEMORIAL OF THE KIRK SESSION OF CARNMONEY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

To the Venerable the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to meet in Belfast in June 2025.

The Memorial of the Kirk Session of Carnmoney Presbyterian Church, respectfully showeth:

That following the clear leading of the Lord, a church planting work was begun on 19 October 2016 in central Belfast under the oversight of Carnmoney Presbyterian Church through the active involvement of an identified core team, with the permission of the Presbytery of North Belfast and, at a later date, the support of the Presbytery of South Belfast through the use of premises.

That the Lord has prospered and sustained the work since that date in significant ways, through both the building up of people and the generous provision of premises of the former May Street congregation, drawing many into the life of His church, with at present close to 300 people currently connected with this church plant, including a sizeable number of children, young people and young adults through regular attendance at weekly worship and involvement in midweek discipleship groups.

That the church plant has well developed and expanded ministries – home groups, prayer, compassion, children’s, youth, students and local outreach initiatives – with a strong sense of spiritual vibrancy, encouraging numerical growth and healthy financial giving from those connected.

That in light of this, it now seems the appropriate time for the relationship between Carnmoney and its church plant to change from the parental to the fraternal, and for ‘Central Belfast’ to become a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in its own right, located in the Presbytery of South Belfast, with the support of the Council for Mission in Ireland through its Urban Mission Development Scheme.

That it would benefit the witness and growth of this new church if they could welcome their own members, elect their own Kirk Session and manage their own affairs, and that it would enhance the development of the ministry of the congregation and mission in the local area if a minister could be called to serve them in due course.

Memorialists, therefore, pray your Venerable Assembly to grant the Presbytery of South Belfast Presbytery authority to establish 'Central Belfast' as a Congregation of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (within the Urban Mission) and place it in the Synod of Ulster, on a convenient date after 30 June 2025.

And Memorialist, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

REV STUART HAWTHORNE, Moderator

MR PAUL ELLIOTT, Clerk

Transmitted by the Presbytery of North Belfast with the strong recommendation that its prayer be granted.

REV REUBEN MCCORMICK, Moderator

MR TREVOR LONG OBE, Clerk

MEMORIAL OF THE KIRK SESSION OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BANGOR

To the Venerable, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to meet in Belfast in June, 2025

The Memorial of the Kirk Session of 'First Bangor', respectfully showeth:

That the congregation first known as 'The Bangor Congregation' was established in 1623 and subsequently constituted as a congregation in 1642, becoming 'First Bangor' in 1829; that the Kirk Session, with the overwhelming support of the congregation on 23 February, 2025, for the facilitation of the work of the gospel in the community, desire that the name of the congregation be changed to 'City Church, Bangor'.

That under the Code Para 106(a) the General Assembly is the only court of the Church which can exercise powers to change the name by which congregations shall be known.

Memorialists therefore pray your Venerable Assembly to change the name of the congregation of First Bangor to 'City Church, Bangor'.

And memorialists, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

REV MAIRISINE STANFIELD, Moderator

MRS ANNE KENNEDY, Clerk

Transmitted by the Presbytery of Ards with the strong recommendation that its prayer be granted.

REV MARK JOHNSTON, Moderator

REV JOHN FLAHERTY, Clerk

MEMORIAL OF THE PRESBYTERY OF ARMAGH

To the Venerable the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to meet in Belfast in June 2025.

The Memorial of Armagh Presbytery, respectfully showeth:

That because “the whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture” (Westminster Confession of Faith 1.6), it is to Scripture as our supreme standard that we must ever turn, especially in seasons of change.

That because our subordinate standards express what “the Church understands the Word of God to teach on certain important points of doctrine and worship” and “serve as a bond of union for members of the Church” (Code Par. 12), it is a healthy exercise regularly to turn together to the collective wisdom of the Reformed tradition found in and flowing from those standards, especially in times of need.

That as those who rejoice that our ascended King Jesus “gave officers necessary for the edification of his church, and perfecting of his saints” (The Form of Presbyterian Church Government, 1645), we believe that ministers and elders have distinctive and complementary contributions to make in promoting the Church’s goal to see all believers equipped to make disciples through the prayerful speaking of the Word of God.

That in view of the current shortage of ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament (which we lament, for we urgently need them), we believe that expounding the distinctive contribution they specifically have been charged to make could see younger believers arrested by a sense of the necessity and dignity of the office to which they too could be called and would affirm and encourage those who are already serving.

That while we recognise that there is much important work to be done, which should not be delayed, we believe that doctrinal clarification and consensus regarding the distinctives of the ordained ministry, especially in this season of change and time of need, would bless our whole Church by promoting the training and serving of ministers under the strategic oversight of our Presbyteries and General Assembly.

That whereas there are differing views in the Church regarding the policy that women are eligible for ordination as ministers on the same conditions as men, the burden of this Memorial is such that this policy is not in focus and to see it addressed is not its intent.

Memorialists, therefore, pray your Venerable Assembly to instruct the Doctrine Committee to prepare a report for the 2027 General Assembly on the distinctives of the ordained ministry of Word and Sacrament according to our supreme and subordinate standards (and the collective wisdom of the Reformed tradition), with focus on our twenty-first century context and our goal to promote faithful and fruitful provision of ministry into the future.

And Memorialists, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Adopted by the Presbytery of Armagh at its meeting in Richhill on 4 March 2025.

REV MARK HAUGH, Moderator

MR ALASTAIR GRAHAM, Acting Clerk

MEMORIAL OF THE PRESBYTERY OF DOWN

To the Venerable the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to meet in Belfast in June 2025.

The Memorial of Down Presbytery, respectfully showeth:

That as Presbyterians, we believe that biblical church government contributes to the well-being of the church.

That the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) constitution recognises the office of the deacon to be a permanent one in the church (Philippians 1.1; new Code par 15), but in what Down Presbytery views as an apparent contradiction to this the Church does not make any provision to ordain deacons, which the Presbytery views as treating a permanent office as if it were temporary.

That notwithstanding the PCI's current practice, many Presbyterian churches around the world do maintain both ruling elders and deacons, in obedience to Christ and to the benefit of their church, as in the church of Jerusalem (Acts 6.7).

That the PCI had serving deacons well into the 20th century and until 1980 made provision for Presbytery to ordain deacons.

That the PCI asks committee members to 'fulfil the biblical role of deacons' but does not honour them with the Biblical office of deacons (new Code par 15.3) or encourage them with the specific promises God gives to deacons who serve well (1 Tim. 3.13).

That the PCI believes in the importance of practical care for brothers and sisters in need (Galatians 6.10) and there is a widely acknowledged increasing crisis in the welfare state, so it is important that the Church play its part here, using the offices God has given to the Church for this purpose.

That this issue was last considered by the General Assembly over 30 years ago, in 1993.

That in 1993 the Assembly's 'Ad Hoc Committee Re Ards Memorial on Deacons' acknowledged that the diaconate was a biblical office and an important part of the Reformed tradition but argued that in the context of the PCI, ruling elders did much of the work of biblical deacons. However, in 2024 the Assembly agreed that elders should be asked to take on more spiritual responsibilities, which leads the Presbytery to feel that the time is right to reconsider allowing the ordination of deacons in order to free up ruling elders from diaconal work.

Memorialists, therefore, pray your Venerable Assembly to ask the General Council to set up a task group to consider how deacons might be ordained, in what we would view as being in consistency with its longstanding constitutional and doctrinal position, and report back, consulting with the Doctrine Committee as deemed necessary.

And Memorialists, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Adopted by the Presbytery of Down at its stated meeting on 4 March 2025.

REV JOHN TORRENS, Moderator

REV MARK SPRATT, Clerk

LINKAGE COMMISSION

Convener: Rev RK GRAHAM

Secretary: Mr WK BELSHAW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report summarises the work of the Linkage Commission from April 2024–March 2025. Matters dealt with include the terms of Leaves to Call granted to 20 charges, reviews of the financial terms in various Leaves to Call, and reports on the work of the internal panels of the Commission. The Commission is required, among other responsibilities, to determine conditions under which congregations shall be linked, vacant pastorates filled or supplied. The Commission continues to believe, that the number of congregations within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are too many to sustain, given the decreasing number of people attending our services and the scarcity in ministers available to be called. When a vacancy occurs, it is understandable that every congregation wants things to continue the way they have always been, and thus seek permission to call their own minister. However, as they examine their finances and the decline in contributing families, they realise that change is needed. Kirk Sessions are familiar with Reconfiguration of Ministry and have taken part in submitting a data gathering exercise, which paints a picture of the viability of the congregation. Where a congregation seeks to enter into a new linkage, or merge with a neighbouring congregation, the help of Presbytery and the Commission is at hand. The experience of those who have come together is that they enjoy being part of a larger congregation, and they often wonder why they did not do this sooner.
2. As the Commission looks at a map of Ireland, it sees vast parts of the island that have no reformed witness, and it realises the Church's calling to make Christ known. How shall they hear without a preacher, and how can they preach unless they are sent? Thus, the Commission has to be convinced of the missional intent of a congregation before leave to call is granted. In addition to its regular meetings, it has held a significant number of meetings with Presbyteries through their Strategic Mission Groups, as together we seek to grasp the enormity of the changing demographics within our denomination. The Commission encourages all Presbyteries to continue to assess the viability of every congregation within its bounds.

Vacancies

3. The Commission notes that a number of ministers who are approaching retirement age are taking steps to prepare their Kirk Sessions and congregations for the impending vacancy. This not only assists the work of incoming vacancy conveners but can also reduce concerns and timescales in filling the vacancy. This practice is to be encouraged. It is of note that,

as a result of this increased preparedness, the time between a vacancy occurring and the granting of Leave to Call has significantly reduced.

4. However, the Commission is also aware that the Church has entered a period when for a few years there will be a reduction in the number of available licensed assistants. This will inevitably increase the length of some vacancies.

United Appeal

5. One of the strengths of Presbyterianism is that the stronger has always sought to help the weaker. This is not only seen in larger congregations coming alongside smaller ones, but also in our support for church planting and mission, both at home and overseas. One of the ways that we support such ministries is through our giving to United Appeal. When a congregation becomes vacant, the Linkage Commission not only looks at all its statistics and finances, but it also takes into consideration its missional intent. One of the factors of missional intent is what we contribute to PCI mission through United Appeal. The target of honour for the last five years is recorded beside the amount paid to the United Appeal on the Congregational Return form submitted to the Commission. The Commission would strongly encourage all congregations to meet their target, if not exceed it, so that the mission of our denomination can continue.

Tenure Review Concept

6. One of the tools in the box of the Commission that is used in granting Leave to Call is Tenure Review. When a minister is called under a Tenure Review, the Kirk Session is to sit down with the minister and draw up goals/objectives/aims within the first twelve months of ministry. These will form part of the assessment made in the subsequent Tenure Review. It has come to light that not all Kirk Sessions are sitting down with their new minister and setting these goals. This can leave the review much more difficult to complete. Copies of the Tenure Review guidelines are given to the Convener of the Vacancy and the Clerk of Session by the Secretary of the Commission on the day that a congregation is given Leave to Call with a Tenure Review. The Commission would remind ministers in a Tenure Review that a copy of the goals/objectives/aims is to be lodged with the Clerk of Presbytery and the Convener of the Linkage Commission.

Dissolutions and Mergers

7. One of the sad duties of the Linkage Commission is to give guidance to Presbyteries that have congregations within their bounds which are approaching the end of their life-cycle. Often when congregations have decided to merge or dissolve, they do not desire it to be a long, drawn-out process. The Commission recognises that it can take some time to sort out all the legalities, and is grateful to Mr Stephen Gowdy, the General Assembly Solicitor, who moves things along as quickly as possible. At present, only the General Assembly has the authority to merge or dissolve a

congregation, and that can mean a long period of time. As Reconfiguration of Ministry takes place, it may be the case that there will be many more congregations seeking to merge. To help this be done more efficiently, the Commission has asked the General Council to bring a proposal that for a period of 24 months, the General Assembly delegate authority to the General Council to merge or dissolve congregations. This will enable congregations to move forward more quickly.

Chair of the Commission

8. Last June, the Commission thanked Very Rev Dr Michael Barry for his selfless dedicated service to the Linkage Commission over many years, and particularly serving as Chair of the Commission since June 2017. As the Commission set about finding a successor, so due process was followed. The Linkage Commission unanimously appointed Rev Jim Stothers as Chair of the Commission. Mr Stothers knows the denomination well, and he knows the Commission well, having served as Secretary, Convener and Deputy Clerk. His knowledge and expertise will be a blessing to the Commission, and indeed the wider church, especially as we navigate changing circumstances.

Leave to Call a Minister

9. This is only a summary, there may well be conditions to the Leave to Call, which are not recorded here. These might include Part-time, Reviewable Tenure, Restricted List, additional income for minister etc. When a figure is set, the year denotes when Leave to Call was granted. This figure will increase automatically under the annual Stipend Review. The same is the case in respect to Ministerial Allowances.

Congregation	Stipend	Allowances
Clough, Co Antrim	£45,000 (2024)	£7,036 (2024)
Mullingar	€22,000 (2024)	€4,090 (2024)
Corboy	€6,000 (2024)	€1,545 (2024)
Glastry	£38,500 (2024)	£7,036 (2024)
Donabate Associate	€AMM (2024)	€9,996 (2024)
First Castledearg	2/3 AMM (2024) plus £2,000	£4,690 (2024)
Killeter	1/3 AMM (2024) plus £1,000	£2,346 (2024)
Greenwell Street, Newtownards	£45,000 (2024)	£7,036 (2024)
Donegal Town	€18,800 (2024)	€6,461 (2024)
Stranorlar	€11,200 (2024)	€4,308 (2024)

Congregation	Stipend	Allowances
Trinity, Omagh	60% AMM (2024) plus £2,000	£4,221.60 (2024)
Gillygooley	40% AMM (2024) plus £1,000	£2,814.40 (2024)
Bushmills	AMM (2024)	£7,036 (2024)
Lucan	€AMM (2024)	€11,269 (2024)
Christ Church, Rathgar	€AMM (2024)	€11,269 (2024)
First Lisburn	£44,000 (2024)	£7,036 (2024)
Strand	AMM (2024)	£7,036 (2024)
Moira	£44,000 (2025)	£7,388 (2025)
Bloomfield	£46,500 (2025)	£7,388 (2025)
Kells, Ballymena	£38,500 (2025)	£7,388 (2025)

Reviewable Tenure Ministries

10. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Sinclair Seamen's was extended for a further eighteen months to allow the minister and Presbytery to take immediate steps to employ an APP whose responsibilities will be missional priorities within the parish area.
11. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Second Keady and Drumhillery was extended for three years from 28 May 2024.
12. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Portaferry was terminated.
13. Reviewable Tenure of the Associate Ministry in Hill Street, Lurgan was renewed for a further three years and the terms were amended to facilitate the development of a new work within the parish bounds of Armagh Road, Portadown.
14. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in St Columba's, Lisburn was extended for a further five years from 24 September 2024.
15. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in St Andrew's, Bangor: the congregation was released from any tenure restrictions on 24 September 2024.
16. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Dundalk was renewed for a further five years. The congregation seeks to increase the Stipend it pays by €2,000 in 2025; by a further €1,000 in 2026, by a further €1,000 in 2027, with a further Stipend Review after three years.
17. Reviewable Tenure Ministry of the Associate in West Kirk North Belfast was renewed for a further three years.
18. Reviewable Tenure Ministry in Alexandra: the congregation was released from any tenure restrictions on 28 January 2025.

Stated Supply Arrangements

19. During the past year, the Commission has renewed a number of previous nominations for a further period in co-operation with the appropriate Presbytery. New Stated Supply arrangements in Warrenpoint & Rostrevor, Dundrod, Armagh Road Portadown, Moneydig and Garryduff were effected.

Dissolution of Congregations

20. During the year, no congregation was dissolved.

Dissolution of Linkages

21. The linkage between Ballycastle and Croaghmore was dissolved on 28 May 2024.
22. The linkage between Garryduff and Dunloy was dissolved on 25 March 2025.
23. The linkage between Moy and Benburb was dissolved on 29 May 2025.

Congregations Linked

24. Five new linkages were agreed.

First Garvagh and Moneydig

25. Terms of Linkage
- (a) That the congregations of First Garvagh & Moneydig be linked on 25 February 2025.
 - (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, congregational committee and finances.
 - (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
 - (d) That in the choice of a minister, the two congregations shall act as one congregation and the two Kirk Sessions as one Kirk Session.
 - (e) That the stated service times each Sunday are:
 - (i) First Garvagh 11.45am
 - (ii) Moneydig 10.15am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
 - (f) That the Stipends be:
 - (i) First Garvagh 60% of £42,000
 - (ii) Moneydig 40% of £42,000 and that Ministerial Allowances be shared on the same ratio 60%/40%
 - (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of First Garvagh manse be borne in the proportions:
 - (i) First Garvagh 60%
 - (ii) Moneydig 40%

- (h) That the minister shall reside in First Garvagh manse.

Kilmakee and Dunmurry

26. Terms of Linkage

- (a) That the congregations of Kilmakee & Dunmurry be linked on 25 March 2025.
- (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, congregational committee and finances.
- (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
- (d) That in the choice of a minister, the two congregations shall act as one congregation and the two Kirk Sessions as one Kirk Session.
- (e) That the stated service times each Sunday are:
 - (i) Kilmakee 10am
 - (ii) Dunmurry 11.30am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be:
 - (i) Kilmakee 50% of £AMM
 - (ii) Dunmurry 50% of £AMM and that Ministerial Allowances be shared on the same ratio 50%/50%
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of Dunmurry manse be borne in the proportions:
 - (i) Kilmakee 50%
 - (ii) Dunmurry 50%
- (h) That the minister shall reside in Dunmurry manse.

Trinity Ahoghill and Grange with Craigmore

27. Terms of Linkage

- (a) That the congregations of Trinity Ahoghill & Grange with Craigmore be linked on 29 April 2025.
- (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, congregational committee and finances.
- (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
- (d) That in the choice of a minister, the two congregations shall act as one congregation and the two Kirk Sessions as one Kirk Session.
- (e) That the stated service times each Sunday are:
 - (i) Trinity Ahoghill 10.30am
 - (ii) Grange with Craigmore 12.00 noon; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.

- (f) That the Stipends be:
 - (i) Trinity Ahoghill 60% of £44,000
 - (ii) Grange with Craigmore 40% of £44,000 and that Ministerial Allowances be shared on the same ratio 60%/40%
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of Trinity Ahoghill manse be borne in the proportions:
 - (i) Trinity Ahoghill 60%
 - (ii) Grange with Craigmore 40%
- (h) That the minister shall reside in Trinity Ahoghill manse.

Rasharkin and Dunloy

28. Terms of Linkage

- (a) That the congregations of Rasharkin and Dunloy be linked on 29 April 2025.
- (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, congregational committee and finances.
- (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
- (d) That in the choice of a minister, the two congregations shall act as one congregation and the two Kirk Sessions as one Kirk Session.
- (e) That the stated service times each Sunday are:
 - (i) Rasharkin 12 noon
 - (ii) Dunloy 10.30 am; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be:
 - (i) Rasharkin 66.66% of £AMM
 - (ii) Dunloy 33.33% of £AMM and that Ministerial Allowances be shared on the same ratio 66.66%/33.33%
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of Rasharkin manse be borne in the proportions:
 - (i) Rasharkin 66.66%
 - (ii) Dunloy 33.33%
- (h) That the minister shall reside in Rasharkin manse.

Moy and Vinecash

29. Terms of Linkage

- (a) That the congregations of Moy & Vinecash be linked on 29 May 2025.
- (b) That each congregation shall maintain its separate identity with its own Kirk Session, congregational committee and finances.

- (c) That each congregation shall have the right to appoint representatives to the Superior Courts of the Church.
- (d) That in the choice of a minister, the two congregations shall act as one congregation and the two Kirk Sessions as one Kirk Session.
- (e) That the stated service times each Sunday are:
 - (i) Moy 10.15am
 - (ii) Vinecash 12 noon; or at other such times as shall be agreed by the two Kirk Sessions.
- (f) That the Stipends be:
 - (i) Moy 60% of £AMM
 - (ii) Vinecash 40% of £AMM and that Ministerial Allowances be shared on the same ratio 60%/40%
- (g) That Rent, Rates, Taxes and Maintenance of Moy manse be borne in the proportions:
 - (i) Moy 60%
 - (ii) Vinecash 40%
- (h) That the Minister shall reside in Moy manse.

Congregations Merged

30. The 2024 General Assembly resolved as follows: “That the congregation of Woodvale be merged with the Presbytery of North Belfast on 31 December 2024, or other suitable date, on terms set by the Linkage Commission.”

Terms of Merger for the congregation of Woodvale into the Presbytery of North Belfast.

- (a) That all existing or future assets, including legacies and bequests, subsequent to the merger, including property or lands not disposed of, become the property of the Presbytery of North Belfast.
- (b) That the Presbytery of North Belfast will remain responsible for any of the liabilities of Woodvale.
- (c) That upon merger, the elders of Woodvale will be Elder Emeritus.

Leave to Call withdrawn

- 31. Ballyroney and Drumlee
- 32. Hilltown and Clonduff

RECONFIGURATION COMMITTEE

33. The Committee began its work following its establishment by the Assembly of 2024, the Transitional Implementation Group of the General Council having made the necessary arrangements.
34. The main work of the Committee has been to resource Presbyteries in the preparation of their Reconfigurations Plans. This has involved sharing information on the process agreed at the 2024 Assembly, and preparing documents to be used in this.
35. Documents for completion by Kirk Sessions have been produced, along with others to enable Presbyteries to analyse the data submitted. The General Secretary's Department has given valuable administrative support.
36. In addition to data gathering and analysing documents, the Committee also produced a Toolbox for the use of Presbyteries, as they consider options for reconfiguration of ministry and mission in their areas.
37. All of the Committee's work has been accompanied with the request for prayer, that the Lord would lead us through this process, and be pleased to use PCI in the upbuilding of his Church, and the furtherance of his Kingdom.
38. The outworking of the reconfiguration process is proceeding at different speeds in Presbyteries. Some had started the process a number of years before the Assembly agreed the denomination-wide approach. In these Presbyteries, there has been significant progress made, as can be seen in the report of the Linkage Commission. Other Presbyteries have been following the timetable in the 2024 General Assembly reports.
39. The Committee is thankful to God for the progress that is being made in this. This thankfulness does not primarily refer to the numbers of linkages and mergers that are taking place. Rather, it is inspired by the attitudes of many Kirk Sessions and congregations towards reconfiguration. Many Kirk Sessions are embracing the process because they have a heart-felt desire to serve the Lord better in their congregation – in worship, fellowship, mission and evangelism, and serving the community. There is an increasing realisation that in many cases, this can be done more effectively together with other brothers and sisters in Christ, in other congregations. The impetus for linkages and mergers in these instances, is not to manage decline in the denomination, but to serve God more effectively.
40. The Committee commends elders and members of congregations in these situations. While there is naturally a sense of loss and regret at these changes, they are treated as subsidiary to the desire to serve the Lord more effectively in ministry and mission. It is the prayer of the Committee that the Lord will be pleased to bless in these situations, and to use newly linked or merged congregations as his instruments, through which the lost are reached, and the saved are deepened in their discipleship of Jesus Christ.

41. The Committee believes strongly that in many situations the Lord is plainly at work in the hearts of elders and members. It is clear that many have been praying for the Lord to work in and through their congregations, and that the renewed focus on reaching the lost is in itself an answer to prayer. The Committee is greatly encouraged by this, and is thankful to God for his mercy.
42. At the time of writing, nine Presbyteries are ahead of the schedule set out in the 2024 Reports. Some have been doing this, although not by this name, for a number of years. The remaining Presbyteries are moving from data gathering, to data analysis, before moving to the formation of a plan.
43. The Committee values the partnership in the gospel with presbyteries, and has benefitted greatly from the fellowship, and from the learning it has gained from them. It looks forward, in the will of God, to this developing further, and prays that the Lord will be merciful to us, in blessing this part of his Church, and using us as an instrument through which to bless others.

DAVID ALLEN, Convener

REVIEWS, ALLOWANCES AND FEES PANEL

Reviews

44. In accordance with Par 236(2) of the Code, and arising out of other circumstances, the Reviews, Allowances and Fees panel reviewed the stipend of the following congregations:

Presbytery	Congregation	Stipend
ARDS	Groomsport	No Change
	High Street, Holywood	No Change
	Movilla	No Change
	Portaferry	No Change
	Strean	No Change
	Trinity, Bangor	No Change
ARMAGH	Ahorey & Clare	No Change
	First Portadown	No Change
BALLYMENA	First Broughshane	No Change
	Connor	No Change
NORTH BELFAST	Alexandra	No Change
SOUTH BELFAST	Dunmurry	No Change
EAST BELFAST	Dundonald	No Change

Presbytery	Congregation	Stipend
	Mersey Street	No Change
CARRICKFERGUS	First Larne	No Change
COLERAINE AND LIMAVADY	Second Dunboe & Ringsend	No Change
DERRY AND DONEGAL	Newtowncunningham & Ray	No Change
DROMORE	Drumbo	No Change
DUBLIN AND MUNSTER	Carlow & Athy	No Change
	Fermoy	No Change
IVEAGH	Ballydown	No Change
	Newmills	No Change
	Tandragee	No Change
	Tullylish & Gilford	No Change
MONAGHAN	First, Second Ballybay, Rockcorry & Drumkeen	No Change
NEWRY	Downshire Road, Newry	No Change
	Second Newtownhamilton & Creggan	No Change
TEMPLEPATRICK	First Antrim	No Change
	First Donegore	No Change

Supply Fee

45. The level of Supply Fee is determined by the Code, Par 238, and for 2025 this is £128 (€186), or £85 (€124) where only a single service is supplied in one congregation.
46. Expenses should be paid in accordance with the rate set for attendance at Assembly Councils, currently:
 - (a) NI – 18p per mile
 - (b) ROI – 26 cents per mile/16 cents per kilometre

STEPHEN WILLIAMSON, Convener

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE AND MANSES PANEL

47. Our general duty as a Panel is to offer advice and review the plans for the development of church property which has initially been approved by the congregation, and subsequently by the associated Presbytery.
48. It is encouraging to witness the desire to improve our building stock, either by undertaking an exciting new-build project, initiating an imaginative reconfiguration, or embarking on some essential maintenance works, which will not only enhance the worship environment, but will also extend the life span of the structure.
49. The Panel welcomes the opportunity to be involved in applications from the length and breadth of the island. Over the past year, projects have extended from Castlerock to Cork and from Keady to Galway. It is always pleasing to see projects which were initial concepts come to fruition, and this was the case with the project in Maynooth where a new-build Church Building was opened in 2024.
50. Manse rentals continue to prove problematic, and the Panel has given specific advice regarding this matter where appropriate. Prior to any legal arrangement being entered into, congregations are reminded that Presbytery and Linkage Commission permission must be sought before the six-month rental period is agreed.
51. After a period of consideration, a review of Manse Guidelines, which was last undertaken in 2016, has been completed. This document was made available for comment and is now available for consultation.

WILLIAM WATT, Chair

ADDITIONAL PASTORAL PERSONNEL AND AUXILIARY MINISTRY PANEL

52. In the past year, the Linkage Commission approved the creation of 25 new Additional Pastoral Personnel (APP) posts, the extension or amendment of 11 existing posts and the creation of 3 Missional Auxiliary Ministry/ Mission Pioneer posts.
53. ‘Guidelines for Congregations and Presbyteries Regarding the Employment of Additional Pastoral Personnel’ incorporating ‘Guidelines for Kirk Sessions on General Employment Issues’ are available from the Panel Convener and the PCI website. The APP guidelines outline the necessary steps Kirk Sessions should take when considering the creation of an APP post. The approval of the HR support provider, Presbytery and the Linkage Commission is required before any new APP post can be advertised.
54. The approval of the HR support provider, Presbytery and the Linkage Commission is required to extend or amend an existing APP post. Kirk Sessions should note carefully when an existing fixed-term contract concludes, so that requests for an extension are made in sufficient time.

55. With regard to job titles for APP posts, Kirk Sessions should note that the Linkage Commission allows flexibility in choosing a suitable job title for an APP post and “most titles will be considered by the Commission. However, the Commission will not give permission for the use of ‘Officer’ or ‘Pastor’ as a job title. Furthermore, the titles ‘Director’, ‘Associate’ and ‘Assistant’ will only be considered if the Kirk Session can justify that the job description strongly warrants the use of the title.” (Linkage Commission, May 2018)
56. APP Salary Scales for 2025 were agreed by the Linkage Commission at its meeting in November 2024. They are available from the Panel Convener and the PCI website. Kirk Sessions are required to use the Salary Scales when creating a new APP post.
57. Guidelines for creating Congregational Auxiliary Ministry posts are available from the Convener of the APPAM Panel. Proposals to create such posts should normally come to the Linkage Commission through Presbytery. Auxiliary Ministers are commissioned to work, normally on a part time basis, under the supervision of a Minister of Word and Sacrament. While it is primarily a ministry of the word, some pastoral duties may be associated with such posts.
58. Before employing an organist (or similar), Kirk Sessions should draw up a statement of main terms and conditions, job description, personnel specification and advertisement. The approval of Presbytery is required before creating such a post. Guidelines and templates are available from the Panel Convener. The HR support provider should always be consulted.
59. Ministers are reminded to seek approval from Presbytery and the Linkage Commission before undertaking paid public appointments (‘Extra-Parochial Work’). This kind of work has been defined as ‘Remunerated work outside of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland undertaken by a parish minister that amounts to more than six hours in any week.’ A return form, available from the Panel Convener, should normally be returned before the appointment begins and then annually by 15 September.

BRIAN McMANUS, Convener

PARISH BOUNDS PANEL

60. Two decisions of the 2024 General Assembly had implications for parish bounds. These decisions and associated comment are set out in the following two paragraphs.
61. That the congregation of Second Newtownards be merged into the congregation of First Newtownards on 31 December 2024, or other suitable date, on such terms as set by the Linkage Commission. [MGA 2024 page 51, resolution 1.] Following consultation with the Presbytery of Ards, the Panel will wait to see how matters develop following the merger.

62. That the congregation of Woodvale be merged with the Presbytery of North Belfast on 31 December 2024, or other suitable date, on terms set by the Linkage Commission. [MGA 2024 page 52, resolution 3(a)2]. Following consultation with the Presbytery of North Belfast, the Panel will wait to see how matters develop following the merger.
63. The Panel noted that the Business Panel of the Linkage Commission, on request from the relevant Presbyteries, gave advice as set out in the following two paragraphs.
64. Outreach in Banbridge: advice was given to the Presbytery of Iveagh concerning outreach by the congregation of Ballydown in premises situated within the parish bounds of another congregation.
65. Outreach in Mayobridge: advice was given to the Presbyteries of Newry and Iveagh concerning outreach by the congregation of Second & Third Rathfriland situated in an area within the parish bounds of two congregations within the bounds of another presbytery.
66. The Convener of the Panel gave advice to the Presbytery of East Belfast concerning parish bounds in the Titanic Quarter of Belfast, where a work of outreach is proposed. In the process, it was discovered that there is an area of the Harbour Estate not included within the bounds of any congregation. Following consultation with the Presbytery, the Linkage Commission recommends that new parish bounds be set for the congregation of Mersey Street, as set out in Appendix 1.

JIM STOTHERS, Convener

APPENDIX 1

Parish Bounds for Mersey Street congregation

Mersey Street 2025

From where the Conn's Water goes under Sydenham By-Pass (J 3653 7503) to Connswater Bridge (J 3635 7422), along Newtownards Road to Albertbridge Road (J 3622 7425), thence along Albertbridge Road to Templemore Avenue (J 3568 7394), thence along Templemore Avenue to Newtownards Road (J 3549 7437), thence along Newtownards Road to Tower Street, thence along Tower Street to Convention Court and continuing in a straight line to the South West end by Musgrave Channel (J 3555 7515); then along centre of Musgrave Channel to point at J 3638 7609, to where Airport Road crosses Musgrave Channel at J 3653 7569; then following the Conn's Water to where it goes under Sydenham By-Pass (J 3653 7503)

COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

Convener: Rev ALBIN RANKIN

Secretary: Rev DAVID THOMPSON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Council for Congregational Life and Witness seeks to support the ongoing life, mission and witness of congregations in their work with all age-groups, through casting vision, assisting in development, offering training and both providing and signposting models of good practice and resources.
2. The report details:
 - (a) The background to the current season of supporting congregational life and witness.
 - (b) Particular pieces of work directly commissioned by, or reporting to, the Council:
 - (i) The *Present* initiative
 - (ii) Developing work in partnership with Presbyteries
 - (iii) Partnership with the Presbyterian Children's Society
 - (iv) Kirk Session guidance/guidelines in relation to the process of electing ruling elders
 - (c) The work of the following committees and panels:
 - (i) The Congregational Life Committee
 - (ii) The Congregational Witness Committee
 - (iii) The Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee
 - (iv) The Children's, Youth and Family Panel
 - (v) The Presbyterian Women Panel

Striking the right notes in supporting congregational life and witness in this season

3. In his parables of the sower and of the wheat and the tares recorded in Matthew chapter 13, Jesus gives an important reminder that at any time, in any ministry, there is likely to be both barrenness and growth, a harvest to rejoice in and a host of reasons to feel frustrated. Failure and fruitfulness coexist. Wheat and weeds appear side by side. This season of life and witness across the congregations of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland is characterised by its fair share of both, as is the ministry of

support for them offered by the Council. We, as a denomination, need to develop eyes wide open to this mix of ministry outcomes and come to a ready acknowledgement of these dual spiritual realities.

4. In engaging in Council meetings and with leaders and members in the current church year, three things have become evident as being especially necessary in supporting congregations in this season.
5. The need to strike a note of encouragement. We need to take fresh courage in whose we are, who we are and for the task of taking the gospel to those places to which, and people to whom, we are particularly intended to bear witness. The Council's *Present* initiative seeks to offer just such encouragement in its simple invitation to renew our calling, intentionally, proactively, scaled with simplicity to whatever size of congregation we are, or kind of season in which we sense ourselves to be ministering.
6. The need to strike a note of confidence. Finding confidence in God, we also need to take confidence from him to live, go and serve in his name, not shrinking back because of difficulty, not shirking responsibility for what he has given us to do.
7. The need to strike a note of thankfulness. Even if the glass looks half empty to us, there is reason to give thanks to God that this means that it is also half full. On that general note of thankfulness, appreciation is due to the three conveners of the of the Council's committees who are standing down at this Assembly on completion of their tenure of service. To Rev Philip McCrea (Congregational Life Committee Convener), Rev Jane Nelson (Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee Convener) and Rev Stephen Richmond (Congregational Witness Committee Convener), the thanks of the Council are conveyed for their invaluable contribution in facilitating the work and providing leadership, especially during, and emerging from, the period of the pandemic.
8. The report that follows outlines some of the main activities undertaken by the Council and strategic directions set in seeking to encourage and give confidence to congregations and their members to minister in a spirit of thankfulness.

PARTICULAR PIECES OF WORK DIRECTLY COMMISSIONED BY OR REPORTING TO THE COUNCIL

The *Present* initiative

9. Last year's General Assembly saw the launch of the *Present* initiative, intended to encourage congregations in this season of their life and witness.
10. The aim of the first year of what will be a three-year initiative was simply to increase awareness of the main theme and following subthemes:
 - Be *present* in this season of life and witness;
 - Be *present* to God as his people;
 - Be *present* for one another in God's family of the church;
 - Be *present* where God has placed us to be his witnesses.

11. Council activity has focused on sharing the basic concept and emphases of the initiative by use of all available channels of communication. These include social media, *Herald* articles, *Tides* devotions, podcasts and video clips. Metrics gathered by the Communications department suggest that quantitatively this means that the initiative has been set before at least 20,000 members out of the denomination's total membership of 182,000. Anecdotally, congregations report that they have shared and used video material, signposted podcasts and that members have appreciated *Tides* devotions on the theme. A full range of *Present* content can be accessed at www.presbyterianireland.org/present. New content will be added as it is developed.
12. As the initiative enters its second year, the focus will fall upon providing some simple ways in which congregations can harness the Present theme for use in a variety of forms, as they deem most useful to them. At a gathering on 25 February 2025, members of Council, its committees and panels, explored how best to resource this work in terms of identifying areas of priority for the encouragement of congregational life and witness, clarifying main messages and designing accessible materials. Feedback overwhelmingly suggested that output should focus on the sharing of stories of how members and congregations are finding ways to express being present to God, one another and where God has placed them to be his witnesses. A number of simple resources to supplement these stories will also be made available for the start of the new church year. The encouragement to have Council staff spend time being present with congregations to help them think through the implications and implementation of how they might express presence in fresh ways will also be extended.
13. It is important to remember that this initiative is offered to congregations. It is not mandatory, nor does it advocate for or impose any particular model of church life. Rather, it encourages congregations under God to prayerfully discern and shape their expression of being present, determined by gifting, resources, circumstances, opportunities and setting for mission.
14. The initiative is modest in its aims and avoids overclaiming what might be achieved. However, it does set out to:
 - encourage congregations to celebrate that God is at work in the ordinary;
 - seek to enable creativity in approaching the spiritual rhythms of our life together in fresh ways;
 - facilitate something of a renewal of the expression of a denominational connectedness among congregations across Ireland;
 - be simple enough for every congregation to engage with, but significant enough to really make a difference.
15. A resolution encouraging congregational engagement with the Present initiative is appended to the report.

Developing work in partnership with Presbyteries

16. The Council continues to be in active contact with Presbyteries in an effort to understand and respond to a variety of presenting needs and opportunities on the ground across Ireland. Last year's report to the General Assembly noted that the Council was *'actively exploring a gradual shift towards the primary means of the support [it] offers for the development of congregational life and witness being delivered in future through partnership with presbyteries.'*
17. Making progress in this area has been difficult. Experience continues to show that engagement with Council activity and its effectiveness is significantly enhanced by co-commissioning, co-designing and co-delivering ministry in partnership with Presbytery. Feedback from those who have participated in such joint ventures shows that they are more likely to address challenges and opportunities experienced by local congregations because of the effort made to understand them and directly respond to them. There have been some notable encouragements where it has been possible to achieve this goal. However, a way of achieving this end on a denomination-wide scale remains elusive for a number of reasons.
18. Generally, the agenda of Presbytery and its capacity to function beyond the increasing demands of the immediate and urgent, is ever more stretched. However much the Council seeks to take the strain of the heavy lifting of the organisation of training or events, Presbyteries often have little available time, space or energy in which to facilitate the kind of work that is an expression of one of their key roles of ongoing oversight and encouragement of the life and witness of congregations under their care.
19. More particularly, a resolution of the 2023 General Assembly encouraged the Council to embark on a listening exercise across all 19 Presbyteries to enable it to better resource the whole church in all its parts. The commencement of that process was paused to facilitate a delay in General Council business relating to the revision of the Code. Having commenced in January 2024, the process proved helpful and effective in scoping and delivering work with five Presbyteries. However, September 2025 saw the onset of a new set of demands made on Presbytery capacity by the Reconfiguration of Ministry process. An agreed attempt to scale back and dovetail the Council's listening exercise with the facilitation of a number of Presbyteries to undertake work related to reconfiguration also ran aground, despite a significant amount of time and effort invested by the Council. Consequently, the Council's attempt to align with Presbyteries by way of a listening exercise as envisaged and agreed by the General Assembly in 2023 has stalled, far short of either completion or realisation of its potential.
20. Positively, more bespoke responses to Presbytery requests and opportunities continue. These have included work in areas as diverse as providing elders' training, the enabling of the establishment of a network of Presbytery youth leaders and an evening intended to stimulate a more strategic approach to congregational outreach.

21. Whatever the obstacles resulting from recent frustrations and current realities, the Council remains committed to exploring and developing an ongoing working relationship with Presbyteries, believing that doing so both respects and harnesses the potential of Presbytery as a key element of Presbyterian polity. The immediate possibility for doing so lies in a positive response from many Presbyteries to the offer of co-designing and co-delivering training for elders. This is the primary avenue for developing partnership that the Council will prioritise in 2025/26.

Partnership with the Presbyterian Children's Society

22. The following framework and process for establishing partnerships with organisations in support of congregational life and witness was agreed by the General Assembly in 2017.
 - (a) Definition of a partner organisation

A partner organisation is one which supplements the provision of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness by sharing specific, specialist support in enabling congregations in their life or witness.
 - (b) Requirements for entering into partnership:
 - (i) The partner organisation's correspondence with the primary doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
 - (ii) The partner organisation's ability to offer support at congregational level for the life and witness of local church ministry and mission.
 - (iii) The partner organisation's provision of a specialism in ministry or mission which complements, supplements or augments congregational enabling offered by the Council for Congregational Life and Witness.
 - (iv) The proposal for partnership be presented to a meeting of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness for approval and reported to the General Assembly.
 - (v) The partnership is terminable by either party at any time.
 - (c) Potential outworking of partnerships:
 - (i) Partnership on specific projects and/or pieces of work.
 - (ii) Inclusion of congregationally focused projects and/or pieces of work in Council communication.
 - (iii) Inclusion of congregationally focused projects and/or pieces of work in Council prayer points.
23. While they remain two distinct ministries and legal entities, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has a longstanding working relationship with the Presbyterian Children's Society. The Society meets the requirements for entering partnership and its unique ministry has much to offer which complements, supplements and augments congregational enabling offered by the Council.

24. At its meeting on 25 February 2025, the Council for Congregational Life and Witness agreed that the Presbyterian Children's Society become a recognised partner organisation with the specific purpose of delivering specialist support for congregations and/or Presbyteries in the area of developing work among children, young people and families.

Kirk Session guidance/guidelines in relation to the process of electing ruling elders

25. At the 2024 General Assembly the following resolution was passed under the report of the Judicial Commission.
- “That the Council for Congregational Life and Witness be asked to consider the provision of up-to-date guidance/guidelines for Kirk Sessions in relation to the process of electing ruling elders, with particular reference to the use of ‘Selection by the Kirk Session’ method as outlined in Par 178(2) of the current Code and the proposed Par 28.2 of the Republished Code.”
26. Further engagement with office bearers of the Judicial Commission has clarified what was required to progress this piece of work in a way that would most helpfully address the intent of the resolution. Scoping what kind of guidance/guidelines will prove most helpful to Kirk Sessions has been undertaken by way of a wider survey relating to the election and training of new elders. It has been agreed that this piece of work will now complete in time to be reported to the 2026 General Assembly.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE COMMITTEE

27. The Congregational Life Committee oversees the Council's work of encouraging and supporting congregations in developing the areas of leadership, discipleship, pastoral life and worship. Major aspects of its work in the last year, along with forthcoming activities, are summarised below.

Encouraging and supporting the development of leadership

28. The Council is responding to an increasing awareness of the need to encourage and develop leadership across the denomination among elders, ministers and other paid staff, as well as those who lead in regular activities and organisations in congregational life. There is a strong sense that we are living through a period of flux in church life in which the luxury of simply maintaining things as they are has rapidly given way to the necessity to do things differently and do different things.
29. An *Afresh* evening for elders was held in Assembly Buildings, Belfast on the evening of Thursday 24 October 2024 and was also live-streamed. The evening saw the launch of four simple postcards covering the basic duties of eldership of knowing, leading, feeding and protecting the flock. The cards offer encouragement, prompt to prayer, and suggest a means of pursuing

each of the roles identified in practice. The resource has been found to be of use by Kirk Sessions in their times together and by individual elders.

30. The *Afresh* evening was a follow on to the previous year's *Refresh* evenings which were delivered in three locations and also live-streamed. There is clearly appetite among elders to develop their ministry and calling. This is also evidenced by invitations received to speak at meetings of Ruling Elders' Fellowships to which the Council is always keen to respond. To build upon this momentum, and resource the ministry of eldership going forward, the Committee has decided to prioritise an update to the *Prepared to Lead* material used in training elders elect. This will be a significant piece of work delivered over a two- to three-year period. A survey of congregations who have elected elders in the last year has been completed. It will be part of a wider scoping which will inform the process of shaping future content and format of material.
31. Rather than assume that the best way to provide encouragement and training for elders was to continue to repeat an annual in-person event in Assembly Buildings which was also live-streamed, the Council Secretary contacted Presbytery clerks to enquire if there was appetite for a rolling programme of evenings for elders delivered through Presbytery, for which content would be co-designed and co-delivered by Council and Presbytery in partnership. The response was very positive, therefore delivery of elders' events in 2025/26 will be by way of pilot events in a number of Presbyteries.
32. Video content of the *Refresh* and *Afresh* elders' events is available for download on the PCI website at www.presbyterianireland.org/elders. This material is usable for Kirk Session devotions, or to prompt discussion and prayer. It could also offer content to use in the setting of an away day.
33. The five-session *Leading Edge* programme took place between January and May 2025. It seeks to equip those in a variety of leadership roles for a more facilitative style of leading aimed at enabling greater engagement, involvement, ownership and sharing of leadership responsibility, especially in the area of congregational change. The themes for five sessions delivered in five mornings across the church year were: Leading from a place of acceptance; Leading in disorienting times; Leading well with others; Leading without having to feel in control; Leading for a change. This gathering has proved invaluable for both honing the ministry of leadership and providing a space in which participants can explore with others their shared and particular challenges of leading today in congregational life. Details can be found at: www.presbyterianireland.org/leadingedge.
34. Partly as a taster for the *Leading Edge* programme, a one-off *Leading for a change* morning took place on Thursday 17 October 2024 in Assembly Buildings, Belfast. These sessions were recorded and will be made available for viewing and sharing on the PCI website in due course. The Council is also keen to explore how the content of the event could be delivered on a Presbytery basis.
35. In the area of encouraging the development of future leaders, an *Emerge* younger leaders' residential in June 2024 attracted 15 participants from

eight congregations. This year it will be delivered as a one-day event on Saturday 14 June 2025. The Youth Development Officer is assisting some neighbouring congregations in leadership development work with those aged 16 plus. The Council also hosted a profitable meeting with representatives from other councils, aspects of whose future ministry and remit depends upon a continuing pipeline of emerging leaders, most notably the Council for Mission in Ireland and Council for Training in Ministry. This discussion scoped current challenges and future opportunities in this area. This conversation will continue to be important as we go forward.

Encouraging and supporting the development of discipleship

36. In many congregations, activity aimed at developing aspects of discipleship beyond Sunday worship continues to face the challenge of changing commitment patterns among members. Time poverty, smaller core membership and reducing leadership capacity seem to be factors at play. This has prompted congregations to revisit length, format and regularity of programming, along with a re-examination of its purpose and effectiveness. Hopefully this will spur imagination and innovation in enabling members in new rhythms and patterns of engaging with Scripture and prayer together.
37. A number of small-scale forums have been held in follow up to a conference entitled *Discipleship Church Today* which took place in October 2023. The aim has been to further explore the conference theme of why discipleship is particularly difficult today, picking up the idea of cultural super-values which are subtle, but pervasive, in shaping society, followers of Jesus and the life of the church in the ways of the world, rather than the ways of Christ. These gatherings will shape future resourcing on the theme scheduled for release in September 2026. As yet it has not been decided what form such resourcing will take, however the Council is keen to explore some new possibilities which will maximise flexibility of use in a variety of congregational settings.
38. The *Finding our voice in prayer* resource was launched in August 2024 to coincide with the start of the new church year. Sales and feedback from congregations who have used the material are encouraging. Full details can be found at www.presbyterianireland.org/findingourvoice. Two video stories of how a couple of congregations are organising for corporate prayer in fresh ways can also be found on the page.
39. An *Age of Opportunity* morning in May 2024 explored the possibilities for age specific evangelism and discipleship among those in later life. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and video content of the event has been repackaged for congregational use and can be found at www.presbyterianireland.org/ageofopportunity. The Committee encouraged further work in tandem with the *Faith in Later Life* ministry to develop some simple resources for discipleship among those in later life. This is ongoing.

40. The *Tides* devotional, offering a framework for the daily discipline of reading, reflecting upon, and responding to Scripture, continues to be appreciated by many, attracting significant numbers of new subscribers.

Encouraging and supporting the development of pastoral life

41. Council input to help congregations rethink and refresh the delivery of the ministry of pastoral care continues to be in great demand. It is clear that significant shifts are taking place in a number of congregations to supplement the pastoral ministry provided by ministers and elders. The Council will continue to share emerging models and encourage congregations to arrive at the particular mix of provision which best suits their circumstances, gifting and resources.
42. A three-evening *Confident to Care* course was delivered in autumn 2024 at Union Theological College, Belfast. This follows on from a very successful first course in May 2024. The Committee decided that the material should be reshaped into a two-hour format so as to enable delivery in shorter form in individual or neighbouring congregations or Presbyteries. Andrew Collins of Biblical Counselling UK is assisting with compilation of outline content and work is underway to create and package material for several pilots in the next church year.
43. The Committee also authorised the further exploration of the theme of lament as one which seems to have contemporary resonance and offers the opportunity to be integrated with other aspects of the Council's work.

Encouraging and supporting the development of worshipping life

44. The PCI Digital Worship Hub continues to be the main vehicle for encouraging and supporting the development of the worshipping life of congregations. It offers a range of resources and ideas for those who construct and lead services of worship. Content is highlighted via PCI social media and other channels of communication to keep the existence of this resource-bank before the church. Congregations have already benefited from suggestions for praise to be used around the seasons of Remembrance, Harvest and Christmas. The hub can be accessed at www.presbyterianireland.org/worshiphub.
45. The Committee discussed reformatting and re-releasing the *Encounter* Bible study material, now out of print, as a free downloadable resource and agreed that this should be considered as an option in connection with resourcing the *Present* initiative subtheme, being present to God as his people.

PHILIP McCREA, Convener

CONGREGATIONAL WITNESS COMMITTEE

46. The Congregational Witness Committee oversees the Council's work of supporting congregations in developing the areas of local outreach, evangelism and involvement in global mission (with content informed by the Council for Global Mission). Major aspects of its work in the last year, along with an emerging future agenda, are summarised below.

Encouraging and supporting the development of congregational outreach and evangelism

47. The launch of *Seasons*, a new evangelism resource specifically shaped for use in rural contexts, has been held back to be released in parallel with the start of the new church year. Its four sessions relate the four seasons of the natural year to particular seasons of life experience. The content is a mix of video story and simple framework for evangelistic discussion centred on a passage of Scripture.
48. A *Stirring spiritual curiosity* morning was held on Tuesday 28 January 2025 in Assembly Buildings, Belfast. It was intended to help members appreciate the changing starting point for sharing faith today and offer pointers on how to stir spiritual curiosity among those who are apathetic to God and Christianity. These are themes that the Committee has been exploring and seeking to unpack for some time. Attendees found the content resonated with their experience in evangelism and helpful in suggesting effective approaches to introducing a faith element to conversation. Speakers Darin and Joy Stevens, who have developed the *Stir* course, also facilitated discussion on evangelism today among PCI youth leaders, a range of stakeholders from other organisations that work in partnership with PCI congregations, and residents at Derryvolgie Hall of Residence. The Committee will discuss how best to build on the learning and possibilities birthed by this event.
49. A four part *Confident to Share* programme has been piloted in conjunction with four congregations in the Ards Presbytery. This may form the basis of future content that could be delivered more widely. Other initiatives undertaken at the request of individual congregations and Presbyteries continue to inform the work of the Committee in terms of awareness of presenting issues on the ground. They also provide opportunity to test material that may have a wider application.
50. There is a sense that basic resources produced for use in and by congregations by the Council in recent years are adequate for now, although they may need an element of repackaging and re-publicity to gain traction.
51. The focus of the Committee is therefore on the gathering and sharing of stories from around the denomination intended to inspire others in witness and evangelism. An Outreach and Evangelism hub is being created on the PCI website to house this material which will also be shared on social media and in the *Presbyterian Herald* magazine. Other mediums of communication, such as the *Tides* devotional, are also being harnessed to seek to raise congregational witness and back up the church's agenda.

52. Becoming a denomination which is more confident to share the gospel will require deep and long-term work. The Committee took time to discuss how congregations might develop a culture of welcome, outreach and evangelism that changes mindset, promotes activity and makes congregational witness a part of church life that comes as naturally as pastoral care, worship and discipleship. This embryonic work will form a backdrop for deciding future Committee direction, messaging and priorities.

Encouraging and supporting the development and delivery of summer outreach programmes

53. A variety of circumstances have dictated that a shift from the longstanding model of centrally organising, recruiting and delivering a number of denomination-wide summer outreach teams each year to actively encouraging, supporting and facilitating congregations or Presbyteries to mobilise teams is being pursued.
54. Initially this has involved seeking to support two possible pilot teams in summer 2025. Stories of what such partnerships can look like in practice will also be shared. The Council is on hand to assist any congregation or Presbytery with the practicalities of running their own team.

Encouraging and supporting the development of congregational involvement in global mission

55. The Concorde Fund continues to provide travel grants for young people going on overseas mission. It has seen an upturn in applications this year.
56. Resources as part of the *Blaze* initiative continue to be released three times per year. They offer a great way to stimulate awareness of and participation in global mission among children and their families in the context of the whole congregation. Stories of how some congregations have done so are available on the PCI website.
57. Capacity is reserved to offer support and suggestions in packaging initiatives identified by the Council for Global Mission initiatives to enable their priorities in encouraging congregational global mission involvement in congregations and among members.

STEPHEN RICHMOND, Convener

PROGRAMME, FINANCE AND COORDINATION COMMITTEE

58. The Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee oversees the management of the Council's large remit, limited staff capacity and a budget that is reducing in real terms. As such, it plays a crucial role in apportioning priorities, time and finance. It also oversees a number of specialist projects.

Overview of events and programmes

59. In total, at time of writing, 221 congregations had participated in at least one Council event or programme in the seven months between September 2024 and March 2025. This is an increase on the same period in the previous church year. It is especially encouraging as the Council is running fewer large-scale events and programmes as it adjusts the balance and focus of activity to delivering directly to, and through, local congregations. The total number of participants in Council events and programmes in the same period is almost double that of the previous church year. This reflects the benefit of working with and through Presbyteries to co-design and co-deliver bespoke content to support the development of commonly identified, local issues of life and witness. In both cases, evidence points to the effectiveness of the Council in responding to the needs of leaders and members and that they are increasingly willing to give of their valuable time in seeking to develop their individual gifts, ministries and the life and witness of their congregation.
60. The Committee has continued to encourage a more regional approach to events, including *Explore* youth evenings, elders' *Refresh* evenings, *Family Festival* and *Kids' Big Day Out* events, and *Foundations* training evenings for children's and youth leaders. The desire is to offer greater accessibility to a greater spread of congregations. In general, this has borne fruit, however going forward it will be important to further explore realistic catchment areas and the impact on overall numbers of participants by going to areas in which there are fewer members who might attend and where there is less willingness to travel even short- to medium-term distances.
61. The use of online provision, where it extends reach and accessibility of Council activity, will continue to be monitored, utilised and explored.
62. The Committee noted the challenges of supporting congregational ministry among young people and affirmed the refocusing of capacity and outputs agreed by the Children's, Youth and Family Panel (see fuller details in paras 87–89 below).

Projects

63. The Committee oversees a number of specialist projects delivered under the auspices of the Council.

Fresh Light

64. Six new gifted counsellors, committed to the model, ethos and theological framework of the ministry, have been recruited. They are based in Dublin, South Down, Cookstown, Coleraine, Bangor and Lisburn. The increase in counsellors has also required the recruitment of another supervisor.
65. Provision of online counselling has commenced, with protocols established and counsellors having received training.

Herald Oversight Panel

66. Editorial responsibility for the *Presbyterian Herald* magazine passed to the Council by decision of the General Assembly in June 2023, although did not come into effect until February 2024.
67. A *Herald* Oversight Panel has been established under the convenership of Rev Robert Herron. One of its first actions was to commission a readers' survey. The survey returned 203 responses which, from a readership of around 7,000, is a good to fair return. 68% of respondents considered the magazine good or very good, only 13% poor. There was a wide diversity of views expressed, many of which reflect current frictions within the denomination as a whole. The services of an independent research consultant were deployed to enable analysis of responses and the compilation of a summary of feedback to the Panel for their consideration.
68. Having considered feedback, the following guiding principles for the next season of the *Presbyterian Herald's* ministry were agreed. These seek to apply the learning from the survey to sharpen the purpose, aims, balance and future format and design of the magazine.

Purpose: The *Presbyterian Herald's* purpose is to be the magazine of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland denominational family, contributing to the flourishing of its life.

Aims: A primary aim of the *Presbyterian Herald* is to gather, curate and share the stories of the life and witness of congregations and their members to encourage, envision and inspire. A secondary aim of the *Presbyterian Herald* is to highlight the story of the work of the denomination in mission undertaken by the councils of the General Assembly to encourage and inform. A currently assumed aim of the *Presbyterian Herald* is that it provides a vehicle for stimulating denominational prayer, yet this was not picked up or widely commented upon in the survey and if that objective is to be retained, current content and design will need to be reviewed as part of the wider denominational communications' strategy.

Balance: The balance of the content of the *Presbyterian Herald* should reflect a breadth of opinion within the boundaries of the stated theological positions and ethos of the denominational family. The balance of the content of the *Presbyterian Herald* should intentionally aim to reach down to a slightly younger audience than that reflected by the majority of current subscribers. The balance of contributors to the *Presbyterian Herald* should be broadened beyond the current range of regular columnists.

69. Format and design: The front cover, font size and layout of the news section, in particular, require review.
70. Having established this direction of travel, steps are being taken to implement the appropriate responses. It should be expected that this will be an evolutionary process, as the demands of continuing to produce ten issues of the magazine per year limits the time available to undertake the work required to focus on any adjustments required to attain future priorities.

71. With reference to the challenges of the workflow issues noted above, permission was granted to explore a reduction in number of issues per year. A number of reasons lie behind the exploration:
 - (a) To create greater capacity to be more intentional about content;
 - (b) To enable smoother, less pressurised, workflow;
 - (c) To position the magazine more strategically and intentionally within the wider range of mediums used by the denomination for communication.
72. The Panel noted that any such change would need to be handled carefully to avoid reduction in subscription income, but could also become a vehicle for a refresh and intentional promotion of the magazine, especially if delivered in tandem with enabling greater digital accessibility. Any reduction in issues can only happen from January 2026 at the earliest, because subscriptions for 2025 have already been secured on the basis of receipt of ten issues per year. The need for any change to fall within the ambit of the wider ongoing review of denominational communication strategy should also be noted.

The PCI Family Holiday

73. Following a wide-ranging engagement between the Council and the Presbyterian Children's Society, whose generous grant funding has supported the vast majority of those attending the event in recent years, it has been decided to discontinue this ministry. The Council records its thanks to many people who down through the years have made such a significant contribution to this ministry and all that it has meant to those who attended and has accomplished in showing and sharing the love of Christ.
74. The Council and Society, which are now in formal ministry partnership (see paras 22–24 above), have explored fresh ways of supporting congregations directly in their work with children, young people and families, especially those who are marginalised or disadvantaged.
75. The first joint initiative will take place on the evening of Tuesday 22 May 2025 at Whitehouse Presbyterian Church. The *Alongside* evening aims to encourage and envision congregations with opportunities for working in partnership with a range of specialist ministry agencies to develop projects that could make a positive difference to the lives of children, young people and families in their community. The Presbyterian Children's Society will also share possibilities for grant funding for congregational projects centred around children and young people which local churches identify as arising out of their own immediate context. On this first foundation for partnership, the Council and the Society look forward to continuing to explore and develop their shared desire to see ministry to children, young people and families encouraged and supported through the ministry of the local congregation.

The PCI Marriage Panel

76. The Marriage Panel's role is to offer support to ministers in the areas of pastorally addressing requests for remarriage and inter-church marriage. Its services can be accessed by contacting the Council office.

Engagement with the Education Authority (NI)

77. This long-standing engagement, with a view to enabling congregations and PCI as a denomination to more easily access funding for work among children and young people, remains paused due to unresolved budgetary issues in the education sector.

Budget and staffing

78. The Committee received updates on staffing and the Council budget. Staffing the administrative support required for the Council's wide-ranging remit remains a particular challenge with capacity now reduced to two full-time and one part-time members of staff. To continue to operate at this level is only possible due to significant work spearheaded by the Programme Development Officer and Office Supervisor to achieve efficiencies by adopting and adapting to new ways of working. However, these gains are increasingly impeded by an inability to ensure the provision of the most basic support services necessary to ensure the smooth running of a ministry of this size and scale.
79. Once again in 2025, it is anticipated that the Council will continue to have operated within its budget received from United Appeal. Against the backdrop of rising costs and a budget reducing in real terms this is a significant achievement, although it should be noted that it is largely the result of savings in salary costs due to a further reduction in administrative staff. The Committee recognises and deeply appreciates the commitment and dedication of both executive and administrative staff in supporting and enabling the life and witness of local congregations throughout the denomination.

Changing trajectories

80. The Committee discussed the changing trajectories of its work. While the Council's remit remains unchanged since its inception in 2015, nearly ten years on so much has changed in the landscape of congregational life and witness across the denomination.
81. The Council has sought to be responsive, agile and imaginative in adjusting both what it does and the way it does it. In the post-pandemic period, it has become clear that some well-worn ways of delivering the ministry of supporting the development of the life and witness of congregations no longer have traction. The backdrop of a reduced staff team and a budget reducing in real terms have also been challenging. However, there is much to encourage in the new paths pursued. The reshaping of the work is happening in three ways:

- Organically – as some long-standing activities and models decline and other aspects of the Council’s remit grow in importance and traction;
 - Organisationally – as new aspects of work come the Council’s way and have to be accommodated;
 - Operationally – in response to reducing staff capacity and budget.
82. The Committee affirmed the approach being taken in seeking to be aware of congregational realities, attentive to the leading and guiding of the Spirit and agile in avoiding becoming either stuck in the past or fixated on creating unchanging models for the future.
83. Those in development worker roles supporting the delivery of encouragement and support for congregational life, witness, age or gender specific ministry, deliver a large volume of work with individual leaders and congregations. This is often unseen, but deeply appreciated. It is an area that the Council would like to see expand, but recognises that capacity is not limitless.
84. This year four staff members have also taken the opportunity to hone their skills in this aspect of their work by enrolling in an enabling ministry certificate course.

JANE NELSON, Convener

CHILDREN’S, YOUTH AND FAMILY PANEL

85. The Children’s, Youth and Family Panel contributes age- and ministry-specific input to Council strategy, programming, events and resources in support of the development of congregational life and witness among children, young people and parents.
86. Over the previous two years the Panel has taken a step back to re-examine how best the Council can support the development of ministry among children, young people and families in what is an increasingly changing set of circumstances for ministry to, and mission among, these groups. The benefits of this piece of work are already beginning to become apparent in bringing focus and priority to the Council’s output. The identification of presenting issues and how best the Council can provide support to congregations has also maximised impact and effectiveness.
87. The strategy for encouraging and supporting the development of ministry among young people in congregations has already required significant readjustment. It is in this area that the Panel has concentrated its work this year, while giving time and space for strategies for encouraging and resourcing ministry among children and families to develop and grow.

Encouraging and supporting the development of ministry among young people

88. The Panel received and deliberated on a wide-ranging paper on this matter which contained proposals for refocusing capacity and outputs of the Council in this aspect of its work. The paper detailed emerging challenges in gaining traction in events and programmes offered by the Council for young people in 2023/24 and the failure to see levels of participation even begin to move in the direction of pre-pandemic levels, resulting in depletion of scarce capacity and budget with little appreciable gain.
89. In response the Panel approved a rebalancing of outputs away from investing in one-off events and short-term programmes directly delivered by the denomination for young people. Instead, capacity is being very intentionally directed towards a sharpening of the support for ministry among young people delivered *in* congregations, *by* congregations. The unique role of the denomination, among a plethora of other specialist ministries and opportunities offered to young people by parachurch agencies, was affirmed as supporting the provision of regular, local church ministry among those in this age and stage of life.
90. The Youth Development Officer has already been focusing on enabling work among young people at congregational level and helping congregations and Presbyteries find ways of working together to deliver ministry activity. This is showing some early signs of promise. It will however be a long term, lower key piece of work, but as is so often the case in ministry, focused, patient intentionality is usually the key to spiritual fruitfulness.
91. Events and programmes for young people discontinued are the *Follow* discipleship programme and the *Impact* summer outreach teams (see also paras 53-54 above).
92. *Explore* events for 11–16 year olds, delivered in partnership with Presbyteries, in Clogherney and Coleraine have been well supported.
93. The Council continues to appreciate its partnership with *Growing Young Disciples* and is signposting its range of ministry as a supplement to its own provision.
94. Many involved in ministry among young people are finding it challenging. Members of the General Assembly are asked to particularly pray for the many congregations that are struggling with both lack of leaders and small numbers of young people engaging in worship and other core activities of the church. The future effectiveness of ministry among this age group will rise or fall on an ability to re-imagine ways of delivering regular provision of age-specific ministry in local church setting and the incorporation of young people into the all-age worshipping and discipling community. It is this goal that the Council is now firmly fixed upon seeking to enable in as wide a range of ways as possible across the variety of local circumstances in which churches find themselves operating.

Encouraging and supporting the development of ministry among children

95. The major annual Council event in this area of its work is *Kids' Big Day Out*. This year it was held in West Church, Bangor, congregation in March 2025. Numbers were encouraging and the varied programme of praise, Bible-teaching and craft on the theme of 'God is everywhere' was appreciated by those who attended.
96. This event is one which the Council have chosen to move around in terms of location so as to allow greater accessibility to a wider range of congregations. This strategy seems to be appreciated and working, but will remain under review.

Encouraging and supporting the development of ministry among parents and families

97. The major annual Council event in this area of its work is the *Family Festival*. Held in May each year, this is the third year of ministry in this form. The venue for 2025 is Spruce Meadows, Lisburn. The afternoon event provides a simple opportunity for churches to bring families who have children involved in their regular organisations and activities, but who may have no other connection with church life, to enjoy a varied programme which is organised and delivered by the Council.
98. Those congregations who have taken this opportunity have found it an easy, end of church year, way of spending some time with families with whom they have built up connection throughout the year. It is hoped that more congregations will seize this opportunity provided to deepen and strengthen relationships with families to whom they are ministering.
99. A *Starting Strong* evening in High Street congregation in Holywood in November 2024, helped parents explore the area of discipleship of their children and showcased the *Kitchen Table Project* material which families and congregations can access to enable and encourage a simple, but significant approach to family ministry.
100. *Hashtags and Hormones* events for parents and leaders, delivered as part of the Council partnership with *Love for Life*, were held in Waringstown and Wellington congregations. They helpfully addressed the increasingly challenging area of helping young people understand and appreciate a Christian worldview on sex and relationships.

Encouraging and supporting leaders in children, youth and family ministry

101. *Foundations* training events were held in Saintfield Road, Belfast and First Ahoghill congregations in October 2024 and were well supported and appreciated.
102. It is recognised that not all leaders can attend in-person events, no matter when they are scheduled or where they are delivered. Two online options were therefore also offered. Uptake was noticeably down on the previous year and continuation of this provision will be reviewed for next year.

103. Gatherings throughout the year and an annual retreat for children's, youth and family workers employed by PCI congregations have been well supported and appreciated.
104. One of the major recommendations of the Panel was the creation of three new Children's, Youth and Family Ministry hubs on the PCI website. The idea is to actively update content and signpost this material to leaders. Significant work was undertaken to collate and refresh material for the hubs, but it fell foul of the difficulties experienced with the denominational website this year. At time of writing, it is most likely that this project will be paused to allow its launch to precede the commencement of the new church year when leaders are likely to be looking for ideas and resources.

DAVID CROMIE, Convener

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN PANEL

105. The Presbyterian Women Panel continues to oversee the support and development of all aspects of women's ministry, reporting initiatives and activities to the Council. It has been another encouraging year in terms of engagement of congregations and members with a variety of events and resources.
106. Following from the General Assembly's approval of a new Constitution for Presbyterian Women in 2024, a reconfigured Presbyterian Women Panel has been formed. For a variety of reasons this has taken longer than anticipated. The reconstituted Panel will commence its work under the approved arrangements from the start of the next church year. From this point, the general functioning of the Panel will be aligned with that of other panels that function under the Council.
107. An autumn event on 7 September 2024 in Assembly Buildings, Belfast, explored the theme 'Entrusted to Share', enabling participants to be better equipped in knowing the gospel and how to share its good news across the generations and in our communities.
108. A spring event took place in Assembly Buildings, Belfast on Saturday 8 February 2025. The theme, 'Servant Heart, leading like Jesus', sought to encourage and equip those who lead in ministry among women to live and serve like Jesus.
109. Both events were well attended by women of all ages and feedback from participants was very positive. Recordings of main talks and seminars can be accessed at www.presbyterianireland.org/pw.
110. The Special Home Project for 2025/26 has been designated to support the Haven multicultural outreach in Sligo. The Special Overseas Project will support the work of the Diaconal Centre run by the Hungarian Reformed Church in Ukraine based in the town of Berehove. The project will focus on the Crisis Centre, originally set up as a mother and baby home but which now accommodates 22 families. The President and Overseas Vice

President were able to visit this project in early 2025, encouraging those involved and seeing for themselves the value of the ministry provided.

111. The annual theme for 2025/26 is 'God... ever present' based on Psalm 46:1. The *Inspirations* resource, available from March 2025, contains a variety of devotions, programmes and resources intended to enable congregations to plan to integrate the theme into their ministries and activities for women. The annual celebration on Saturday 10 May 2025 in Assembly Buildings, Belfast, will formally launch the theme. The speaker will be Siân Wyn Rees.
112. The *Inspire* magazine continues to provide a wide variety of content intended to inform and encourage ministry among women.
113. Presbyterian Women continues to provide significant prayer and financial support for the work of the Council for Mission in Ireland and Council for Global Mission, as well as deaconess training.

ELLEN HILLEN, PW President

COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION

Convener: Rev S.A. McCracken

Secretary: Rev W.S. Marrs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The work of the Council for Global Mission is reflected in the strapline, 'global disciples sharing God's heart for the world, declaring good news and demonstrating God's love'. As such, it points to both the Great Commission and the Great Command, and recognises the call to authentic fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ all around the world. The Council is tasked with enabling the coordination and delivery of global mission as determined by the General Assembly (Code Par 115), and especially where it is beyond the ability of the local congregation and not falling under the remit of other mission councils, partners or agencies. This entails the development of a strategy on mission overseas, including partnership with overseas churches and sending global mission workers; promoting world development issues, including providing for an annual appeal; leading thinking on issues of global concern such as the environment, race relations, international relations (Code Par 278(3)).
2. This report sets out the work of the Council for Global Mission from June 2024. The Council for Global Mission was able to meet on 23 October 2024 and 19 March 2025 and reports as follows:
 - (a) **Global Mission Committee** (Pars 3 to 17).
 - (b) **Global Development Committee** (Pars 18 to 30).
 - (c) **Business and Finance Panel** (Pars 31 to 34).

GLOBAL MISSION COMMITTEE

3. The overarching work of the Council is to share the Good News of the Gospel throughout the world and through this work, longing to see many coming to a saving faith in Jesus Christ and living a life of service for him. Alongside declaring the Good News, the Council has the responsibility of partnering with like-minded brothers and sisters throughout the world who are committed to sharing the Gospel, especially those who are suffering for their faith or enduring hunger, poverty and war as daily realities. Through such partnerships, the Council seeks to listen humbly and learn, whilst offering support where helpful.
4. **Prayer and reflection:** An Away Day was organised in May 2024 to enable members of the Committee and its panels to prayerfully reflect on God's

work being carried out through PCI Global Mission Workers, partner churches and agencies across the world. The Away Day highlighted that mission belongs to God and he calls his church to be his co-workers. Time was taken to reflect on the changing face of mission today which has been impacted by two main factors, namely the shift in Christianity from the Global North to the Global South (two thirds of Christians now live in the Global South) and the decline in the number of Global Mission Workers serving overseas from 72 in 2012 to 17 in 2024. Since the Away Day the Committee has been considering how PCI may take forward Global Mission in the next three years, reflecting on the global changes in mission as well as seeking God's guidance on the weighting of resources allocated between the sending of PCI global mission workers and collaborating with partner churches on the training of their church leaders and local missionaries. The Committee reflected on Acts Chapter 13 and on the manner in which the early church sent out its first missionaries. The basis for such decision-making was not so much discussion but prayer and fasting which, in turn led to discernment and the direction of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, the Committee sees the need to prayerfully seek God's guidance for the future.

Global Mission Workers

5. The Council gives thanks to God for the 19 global mission workers of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland who, as his witnesses, serve in eight countries around the world. Details of roles, locations and global mission partners for those currently serving with the Council are found at Appendix A.
6. Calls to global mission service in Spain were issued to Neil and Jenny Stewart. Along with their three young children they will be serving in Bilbao.
7. Memorial minutes were recorded in respect of the following: Claire Trueman, Missionary to Jamaica (1962–99), Cynthia Knott, Missionary to Malawi (1980–85) and John Cecil McCullough, Missionary to Lebanon (1975–84).
8. A minute of appreciation was recorded in respect of Steve and Rosie Kennedy, Global Mission Workers to Romania (2020–2024).
9. Deputation: Global Mission Workers on home assignment have had the opportunity of speaking in a range of congregations highlighting their work and thanking congregations for their prayerful and financial support. The release of 'Digital Dispatches' videos from PCI's global mission workers every six months has provided updates on their work and highlighted points for prayer. From time to time, Digital Dispatches videos will feature 'Blaze the bee' by way of encouraging children and families across PCI to explore what it means to be a global disciple and engage more fully in God's global mission. Global Mission Worker prayer bulletins continue to be made available on a monthly basis, along with updates in the Mission Connect section of the *Presbyterian Herald*.

Global Mission Relationships

10. The Committee is deeply aware of the varied and ongoing impacts of war and civil unrest on a number of PCI's partners around the world and endeavours to highlight these for the prayerful concern of the wider church through the *Presbyterian Herald* and Let's Pray. The number of partnerships the Council seeks to sustain remains under review, mindful of Mission Department staffing capacity. In considering the current number of PCI's partners, PCI endeavours to relate to its partners as 'family' rather than to end partnerships in a way that 'burns bridges'. A list of current partners, companions and networks is provided in Appendix B.
11. The General Assembly in 2024 received a report which included those who are partners, companions and networks. The task group that undertook this initial work continues to meet to evaluate what resources are required to ensure these relationships can be meaningfully sustained. When it comes to preparing and disseminating information in the wider church about partners and providing a focus on their work, priorities will be set for the next two to three years.
12. The following overseas visits took place during the past year to meet with partners, attend conferences, visit projects and share in the pastoral support and encouragement of Global Mission Workers:
 - Stephen McCracken and Heather Clements to Malawi for the CCAP 100th Anniversary Celebrations, August 2024
 - Uel Marrs to Kenya for a Misesan Cara 20th Anniversary church leaders' visit, 6–13 September 2024
 - Barry McCroskery and Uel Marrs to Germany for the Eukumindo General Assembly, Stuttgart, 11–14 September 2024
 - Gordon and Sandra Campbell to the Faculté Jean Calvin Jubilee Celebrations, Aix-en-Provence, 21–22 September 2024
 - Uel Marrs to the 4th Lausanne Congress, Seoul, South Korea. 20–29 Sept 2024
 - The Moderator, Richard Murray, and Uel Marrs to Poland to meet with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Poland, 5–9 December 2024
 - David Bruce to Kolozsvár, Romania to attend the installation of Rt Rev Dr Vilmos József Kolumbán as the 47th Bishop of the Transylvanian Reformed Church District, 31 January–2 February 2025
 - Ellen Hillen and Linda Beattie, Presbyterian Women Representatives, and Uel Marrs to Budapest, Hungary, and Transcarpathia (Ukraine) to visit with the Transcarpathian Reformed Church District, 2–6 February 2025
 - Stephen McCracken and Neil Harrison to Spain, to visit Derek and Jane French, Bilbao International Church and the Basque Country Project Team, 9–12 March 2025

- Helen Johnston to visit the Reformed Church in Hungary, Transtibiscan District, and with Csaba and Ilona Veres, 27–31 March 2025
 - Liz Hughes and Heather Clements to ‘The Unheard Voice, Women’s Persevering Witness in War’ – Women’s Conference, Lebanon, 1–7 April 2025
 - Stephen McCracken and Helen Johnston to United Mission to Nepal General Assembly and for a cluster visit, Nepal, 4–19 May 2025.
13. The following visits are due to take place later this year:
- England: Uel Marrs to visit Edwin and Anne Kibathi, June 2025
 - The Netherlands: Uel Marrs to Eukumindo General Assembly, Rotterdam, 3–6 September 2025

Global Mission Partnership Grants

14. The Council approved a schedule of grants for 2025 totalling £108,250 for the support of 23 partner projects covering 13 countries. The funding for these grants comes from the United Appeal, the World Development Appeal and designated donations.
15. The Council for Global Mission received funding totalling £99,550 during 2024 through partnering with Miseen Cara, an international and faith-based missionary movement working with marginalised and vulnerable communities. This funding is supporting the work of The Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Samburu Awareness and Action Project in Tuum improving girls’ education, building community leadership and developing livelihoods; and The United Mission to Nepal (UMN) improving school management and governance systems, creating ‘child-friendly’ classrooms, training teachers and improving water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in Bahjang District; and Minority Focus, Nepal, who received emergency funding for their Jajarkot Earthquake Response.

Global Training in Leadership Scholarships

16. In 2024 the Council approved a schedule of scholarships for 2025 totalling £22,100 in support of 14 leaders in training from eight partner churches in six countries.

Strategy for 2025-2027

17. The Global Mission Committee’s focus is on declaring the Good News of Jesus Christ. Over the next year it will continue to seek God’s guidance and to prayerfully discern priorities and where the emphasis should lie, whether on the sending of Global Mission Workers overseas, on partners’ training of national leaders or other local initiatives. This will be in tandem with the work of the Global Mission Partnership Panel as it completes the review of resourcing our relationships with partners as well as determining how these relationships can be deepened.

HEATHER CLEMENTS, Convener

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

18. In recent times there have been quantum shifts in global relationships. How these are interpreted may differ, but they unquestionably cause uncertainty and concern for people in the pews and PCI's partners around the world. These dynamics would not have been unusual to those of the early church, not least to the recipients of the Book of Revelation.
19. Further, and even more importantly, as Scripture reminds us, in the midst of upheaval God has not changed. He is totally reliable; his purposes will be fulfilled and his people will be sustained by his grace. Presbyterians do well to hold on to the hope that is in Jesus Christ when approaching matters of global geo-political significance.
20. One of these matters is the reduction in the UK international aid budget. In a press statement, deep concern was expressed that those who suffer most from these cuts (i.e., the poorest), are least well able to absorb this reduction. PCI calls on the UK Government to reconsider their position.
21. A constructive day away was held in August 2024 which provided opportunity to consider the work of the Global Development Committee, and how it might best channel its energy. The Committee noted the importance of prayer in discerning God's will, considering the needs of people, working with partners and other councils, and serving congregations, in seeking to encourage global discipleship. The focus of the Committee must complement and contribute to the wider mission of the church.

The World Development Appeal

22. The World Development Appeal Task Group, under the able leadership of Rev Liam Rutherford, World Development Appeal Agent, continues to coordinate the annual World Development Appeal, so ensuring that PCI, as a denomination, is maintaining a commitment to the world's poorest. The final total for the 2023 Appeal was £504,521. This has now been distributed through PCI's partners. The 2024 Appeal was launched on October 2024, and is entitled 'Hunger pains, Scarcity to Abundance'. With an underlying theme of food security, the lead project is with a Tearfund partner in Rwanda. The total for the 2024 appeal as of 25 March 2025 is £427,465.
23. The 2025 Appeal will focus on sustainable livelihoods with a Christian Aid lead project in Honduras. A team comprising, Liam Rutherford (WDA Chair), Ruth Cooke (Christian Aid Ireland) and Chris Nelson (Storyhouse Films), visited the project site in Honduras from 18–26 March 2025.

Stewardship of Creation

24. The Stewardship of Creation Task Group, under the convenership of the Agent, Michael Jemphrey, is planning a Creation Care Conference. It is proposed that this will take place (DV) on Saturday 27 September 2025 in Assembly Buildings. The title is 'God's World: Our Responsibility' and the keynote speaker is Dr Chris Wright. The target demographic is members of PCI, and in particular ensuring those who are aged 35 and under have access.
25. The Conference will celebrate God's good creation, and seek to provide resources for those navigating the various viewpoints on creation care and climate change. To this end conversations have been had to ensure that the conference is as inclusive as possible, without distracting from its primary focus. Publicity for the conference will be forthcoming in the *Presbyterian Herald* and social media in the next few months.

The Middle East

26. A Middle East Task Group has facilitated a Day of Prayer with Christians in the Middle East in South Kirk Presbyterian Church on Friday, 4 April 2025. A number of videos were sourced from partners in the region and in addition, other materials have been made available to aid prayer. These resources have been made available on the PCI website to be used by congregations and small groups throughout the denomination.

Intercultural Relations and Persecuted Minorities

27. In the absence of an Intercultural Relations Agent and a Persecuted Minorities Agent, the Global Development Committee has sought to keep abreast of the wider challenges and to keep a watching brief on developments.
28. Over the years, the Committee has valued a relationship with the Churches' Commission for Migration in Europe (CCME), which has recently been decoupled from the Conference of European Churches (CEC). At the appropriate time the Committee will explore a conversation with the General Council regarding denominational membership of CCME.

Communications strategy

29. Neil Harrison, Mission Development Officer, continues to develop a communications strategy and this includes linking in with initiatives from the Council for Congregational Life and Witness, mindful of the importance of highlighting the various dimensions of the work of the Global Development Committee.
30. The Committee continues to acknowledge gratefully God's hand in leading it along his paths and is very thankful to all who contribute time and expertise to meetings of the Committee and its task groups. In particular, appreciation is expressed to the staff in the Mission Department.

RICHARD KERR, Convener

BUSINESS AND FINANCE PANEL

Finance

31. The Council records its deep appreciation for the United Appeal funding received each year that makes possible so much of its work, together with the generous grant received annually from Presbyterian Women. Council for Global Mission accounts for the year 2024 indicate an operating surplus of £382,362 on the Income and Expenditure Account although this surplus reflects unrealised gains on investments of £250,418. From 1 January 2025, Global Mission Worker – Ireland, allowances were increased by 3.5%. A United Appeal grant of £810,000 was approved for 2025, with the Council requesting £830,000 for 2026. In the course of the year, restricted donations of £781,094 were received, including Irish Aid funding through Mísean Cara of £99,550 for partner projects. In the past year a Funding Strategy Task Group has commenced an analysis of the Council's General Investment Fund (GIF) reserves and consideration of how best to use funds from the sale of Grasmere Avenue property, in tandem with the Global Mission Committee's strategic review of the allocation of resources across the range of denominational global mission engagement.

Property

32. The Council continues to own three properties as follows: Two, three-bedroomed apartments at 5 Osborne Mews, 81 Osborne Park and 12 Oakdene Lodge, 16 Annadale Avenue. They are regularly maintained and well used mainly by Global Mission Workers, interspersed by some short-term rentals. Towards the end of 2024 the kitchen was refurbished at 5 Osborne Mews and the bathroom will be refurbished mid-2025. The Council agreed that the proposed sale of a semi-detached house at 214 Grasmere Avenue, Wembley be delayed until 31 January 2026.

Communication and promotion Strategy

33. A communication and promotion strategy for the Council for Global Mission has been drafted in the anticipation that it will dovetail with the overall PCI communications strategy that is in the process of being developed. It is a guiding principle of the Council to be able to tell the story of global mission in creative ways, keeping the wider church well informed. While the Council aspires to be more effective in this regard, much depends on having adequate staffing capacity to ensure that meaningful stories are generated and shared.

Staffing

34. The Council is indebted to the Mission Department Staff Team who, although significantly stretched for prolonged periods in the past year, have served with great dedication, flexibility and understanding to ensure that deadlines were met and work progressed. Given a context in which the filling of vacancies has continued to prove challenging, the Council is very grateful for the services of Donald Garvie in the role of Mission Support Officer – Partnerships (part-time) from 19 March–31 October 2024 providing maternity cover for Pip Florit who returned to work on 1 February 2025; also for Evie Craig who was appointed as Administrative Assistant, commencing work on 1 April 2025; and not least for the timely administrative cover provided by Joyce Anderson. The Council expresses its heartfelt appreciation to the whole staff team.

STEPHEN McCRACKEN, Convener

APPENDIX A

GLOBAL MISSION WORKERS

Global mission workers: the names, spheres and category of service at the time of writing (April 2025) are listed below:

INTEGRATE PROGRAMME – service of two or more years

Brazil

Naomi Keefe	2004	Outreach programme, The Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB), Recife
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Central and Southern Africa

Volker and JinHyeog Glissmann	2010	Consultant to Theological Education by Extension in TEEC – South Africa Music Teacher in Phoenix International Primary School in Blantyre – Malawi
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Great Britain

Edwin and Anne Kibathi	2009	Ministry among East Africans in East London
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Hungary

Csaba and Ilona Veres	2001 1993	Outreach and church planting in the location of Bodaszölö in partnership with the Reformed Church in Hungary (Transtibiscan District) in Hajdúböszövény – Calvin Square Congregation (since 2024)
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Kenya

Stephen and Angelina Cowan	1985 1989	Outreach and development work, Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), Tuum
Naomi Leremore	1991	Development of Theological Education by Extension materials, PCEA, Nairobi
Gary and Mary Reid	2000	Outreach and development work, PCEA, Olkinyiei

Russia

Two global mission workers	2019	Theological education
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Spain

Derek and Jane French 2000 Student outreach with Grupos Biblicos Unidos (GBU), and Bilbao International Church (BIC)

Neil and Jenny Stewart 2025 Outreach, discipleship and church planting with the Basque, Country Project Team, Bilbao International Church (BIC)

Zambia

Diane Cusick 1995 Early Childhood Development Officer, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Zambia Synod (since 2016)

APPENDIX B

GLOBAL MISSION RELATIONSHIPS

PCI is currently engaged in global mission relationships with the following churches, institutions and agencies:

Partners (12)

- The Hungarian Reformed Church
- Christ the Saviour Presbyterian Church, Poland
- The National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon
- The Presbyterian Church of East Africa
- The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (Malawi and Zambia Synods, General Assembly, and Zomba Theological College)
- The Christian Church of Sumba, Indonesia
- The Evangelical Christian Church of Halmahera, Indonesia
- The Protestant Christian Church of Timor, Indonesia
- The Church of North India (General Assembly and Gujarat Diocese)
- The United Mission to Nepal
- The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
- The Presbyterian Church of Brazil

Exploratory partnerships (2)

- The Greek Evangelical Church
- The Presbyterian Church of Guatemala

Companions (15)

- The Christian Presbyterian Church of Portugal
- The Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary, Latvia
- Faculté Jean Calvin, France
- St Petersburg Christian University, Russia
- Scripture Union, Malawi
- The Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary, Jordan
- The Near East School of Theology, Lebanon
- The United Bible Training Centre, Pakistan
- The Association for Theological Education, Nepal
- Minority Focus, Nepal
- The Student Christian Organisation of Malawi
- PakMission, Pakistan
- The Cross Reformed Centre, Nepal

- Al Bashir, India
- THIMAR (formerly LSESD), Lebanon

Network (1)

- Northern Spain Church Planting Network (including Grupos Biblicos Unidos, Andamio and Bilbao International Church)

COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND

Convener: Rev Dr BEN WALKER

Secretary: Mr RICK HILL

INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The report covers the period from July 2024 to April 2025.
2. The Council continues to seek to deliver on the following components of its remit:
 - (a) Developing PCI's strategic priorities in all-age mission in Ireland, and planning initiatives at General Assembly level where appropriate.
 - (b) Considering new church development and church planting.
 - (c) Overseeing all aspects of the Home and Irish Missions, including the Irish Mission Fund.
 - (d) Overseeing the deployment and ongoing support of Deaconesses.
 - (e) Supporting a chaplaincy service in the Forces, Hospitals and Hospices, and Prisons.
 - (f) Supporting mission and ministry in Universities and Colleges through chaplaincy services.
3. Following the completion of Very Rev Dr Frank Sellar's term as Convener of the Council at last year's General Assembly, Rev Dr Ben Walker has taken on the role as Council Convener, with the continued support of Mr Rick Hill as Council Secretary.
4. Since September, the newly-restructured Committees and Panels within the Council have worked with adjusted and, in some cases, expanded remits. Most notably, the Chaplaincy Committee now oversees all elements of chaplaincy ministry and the General Purposes Panel deals with aspects of both property and finance, under the Convenership of Mr Hugo Wilson.
5. The Council met twice in-person for routine business and once online to consider the issuing of calls. Most meetings of the various Committees and Panels were held in-person with a facility to join online.
6. This has been a challenging period for the Mission Department, with the staff team operating at a reduced capacity for several months due to a vacant administrative post, a maternity leave and staff illness. Thankfully the staff team is now back to its full complement, with the commencement of Mrs Evie Craig in an administrative role and the return from maternity leave of Mrs Pip Florit, Mission Support Officer (Partnerships). It would be important to pay tribute to Ms Helen Johnston and Mr Neil Harrison for the significant work they have carried in their executive roles, as well as the administrative support from Mrs Michelle Pollock and Mrs Joyce Craig

within the Department. The Council is also thankful for the temporary work undertaken by Mr Donald Garvie and Mrs Joyce Anderson in providing cover during maternity leave and staff illness respectively.

7. As well as providing updates on the Council's ongoing work, such as new developments within the Home Mission, church planting, mission projects and calls to Deaconesses and Mission Pioneers, this annual report will show how this has been a season of grappling with some major big-picture issues that aim to shape aspects of the Council's future work or offer helpful principles for the mission of the wider church.
8. Three such areas form a large substance of the Council's report to the Assembly in 2025:
 - (a) A report by the Strategy for Mission Committee, developed through its Church Planting Panel, that seeks to set a church planting target for the next decade before the denomination, along with a strategy that considers ways for this to unfold and how the Council might allocate its resources accordingly.
 - (b) A report shaped by the Strategy for Mission Committee, initially through a Task Group and then by a subsequent forum event, focused on 'Mission as a Minority' and seeking to offer principles and practices for the effective mission of the church in areas where Presbyterians represent a significant minority and the community is predominantly culturally Roman Catholic.
 - (c) A report by the Chaplaincy Committee considering the vision, ethos and nature of Chaplaincy ministry from a church-shaped perspective, aiming to offer a vision to the wider church for the missional opportunities that lie in this form of service.
9. The Council continues to be thankful for the support given to it via the United Appeal for Mission and is encouraged by the clear ways in which the Holy Spirit is at work through such a variety of people serving across this island and pointing people to Jesus.

STRATEGY FOR MISSION COORDINATION COMMITTEE

10. The Committee has been giving consideration to one of its identified key priorities, to respond to the rapid expansion of the major cities of Ireland, particularly Dublin and its outer ring, with a greater resourcing of ministry and mission via the provision of ministers, additional mission roles and mission projects. The Council has been working with some congregations to consider the part they can play in new church development north of Dublin, while a Task Group has been appointed to consider possible developments in the south-west of Ireland.
11. A Task Group considering the theme of 'Mission as a Minority' completed its work, making a number of recommendations through an initial report that was received by the Committee. The report seeks to offer a helpful

summary of missional principles and practices for areas where Presbyterians represent a significant minority and the community is predominantly culturally Roman Catholic. Following reflection by the Committee and the testing of its content at a forum event, the report was refined and developed before being approved by the Council. This is contained in full in Appendix 2 to the Council's report for the consideration of the General Assembly.

12. Following a request from the Reconfiguration of Ministry Transitional Implementation Steering Group, the work of the Belfast Conference was paused from January 2025 for a period of 18 months during the Reconfiguration of Ministry process. Conference members, including members of the three Belfast Presbyteries were notified and no advisory comment was offered.
13. Assessments were carried out in the congregation of Strand in regard to its vacancy and, following a request by the Linkage Commission, the city of Londonderry more generally.
14. In collaboration with the Monaghan Presbytery, the Committee developed draft proposals for new ministry arrangements in Ballina and is progressing these with the Linkage Commission.
15. The Committee noted the recommendation of the South Belfast Presbytery to merge the congregation of Taughmonagh with the Presbytery, which was similar to the spirit of previous CMI recommendations. The Committee agreed that, in this instance, it may be built into the terms of merger that property grants may still be availed of by the Presbytery in relation to the building for a period of three years.
16. The Reimagining Ministry Task Group was thanked and discharged, with the final action points to be outworked in collaboration with the Council for Congregational Life and Witness in due course.
17. The Urban Mission Network continued with an Autumn event held in Ballyhenry led by Legacy on the issue of fatherhood. A visit to a summer conference hosted by the London City Mission is being planned for 24–26 June 2025, with 10 attendees from the network.
18. Following a positive 'Welcoming the Stranger' event in Drogheda, it was agreed that a similar event be planned for the west of Ireland. This was held on Saturday 5 April 2025 in Donegal.

CHURCH PLANTING PANEL

19. The Panel continues to believe that the planting of new churches is one of the key ways of ensuring future health and growth as a denomination across the island of Ireland.
20. In light of this, prayerful and thoughtful consideration has been given to setting a church planting target for the next decade before the denomination. A major report, *Church Planting – The Next Decade*, outlines this thinking, with an overarching vision for the Church to pray

for and work towards at least 10 fully constituted new congregations and at least 10 more church planting projects in the next 10 years. The report, contained in Appendix 1, also includes a strategy that considers ways for this to unfold and be resourced.

21. Consideration continues to be given to how best to envision the denomination regarding the importance of new churches. To that end, a Church Planting Taster Day was held in Maynooth in November 2024 to envision congregations and individuals to be involved in church planting, with over 50 attendees and representation from every province.
22. The development of a Church Planters' Network for those involved in leadership of current church planting projects within PCI has been a significant encouragement. Input has been offered at network gatherings by Rev Andy Carroll, Rev Dr Keith McCrory and representatives of City to City.
23. Consideration is being given to holding a church planting conference in early 2026, as well as ways to dovetail with the Council for Global Mission regarding church planting practice.

TOM GILLIAM, Convener

MISSION GRANTS PANEL

24. Having paused new grant applications for a number of months due to the Mission Grants budget being close to its capacity, the Panel resumed receiving applications, with a number of new grants awarded and awaiting appointment.
25. A number of grant applications were approved to enable the support of Community Outreach Workers in Fermoy and Cahir, Cooke Centenary and St Andrew's, Bray.
26. Some one-off small mission grants were awarded to support Presbyteries or congregations in specific mission projects. These included grants to the Dublin and Munster Presbytery towards outreach costs at the Irish Ploughing Championship, Ballydown to support running costs of its church plant in Banbridge, Castlewellan to enable refurbishment of a building used for community outreach and the congregations of Tullamore and Maynooth to enable Christmas outreach.
27. A two-year grant extension was offered to Alexandra and a one-year extension was granted to Ballycrochan to enable the continuation of Community Outreach Worker roles.
28. The Panel considered a number of applications for grant-aided support of Mission Pioneer roles, with approval for the congregations of Ballycastle and Rathcoole, and the Presbytery of South Belfast in regards to The Village Project.
29. A number of conversations are ongoing, which may lead to new grant applications in the coming months, however the Panel continues to

carefully evaluate all applications with regards to missional intent alongside ensuring all approved grants are within the budget.

30. A training grant of £300 continues to be offered to Community Outreach Workers in the first three years of their role, with several requests approved by office-bearers.
31. It should be noted that due to recruitment challenges in some situations, it can be some time before awarded grants are drawn down, at times leading to underspend of the annual budget.

KENNY HANNA, Convener

DARYL EDWARDS, Committee Convener

MISSION PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

Directory of Home and Urban Mission charges as at April 2025

Minister	Charge
Home Mission	
Rev Michael Anderson	Arklow
Rev Gunther Andrich	Irvinestown, Pettigo and Tempo
Rev Rodney Beacom	Lisbellaw, Lisnaskea, Maguiresbridge and Newtownbutler
Rev Damien Burke	Drogheda
Rev Andy Carroll	Donabate
Rev David Clarke	Sligo
Rev Richie Cronin	Trinity Cork and Aghada
Rev David Curran	Wexford Church Development
Rev Jonathan Currie	Kilkenny
Rev Alastair Dunlop	Howth and Malahide
Rev Daryl Edwards	Drum, Cootehill and Kilmount
Rev Helen Freeburn	Galway
Rev Andrew Gill	Blackrock and Bray
Rev John Hanson	Clones, Stonebridge, Ballyhobridge and Newbliss (part-time)
Rev William Hayes	Tullamore
Rev Josh McCance	Donabate Associate (Balbriggan Church Planting)

Minister	Charge
Rev Dr Keith McCrory	Maynooth
Rev Gary McDowell	Greystones
Rev Jean Mackarel	Drumkeeran, Killeshandra, Cavan and Bellasis
Rev William Montgomery	Fermoy and Cahir
Rev David Moore	West Belfast Special Ministry
Rev Wallace Moore	Corboy and Mullingar
Rev Philip Poots	Moville, Greenbank, Carndonagh and Malin
Rev Jonathan Porter	Dundalk
Rev Mark Proctor	Naas (with additional chaplaincy duties)
Rev Stephen Rea	Carlow and Athy
Vacant	Ballina and Killala
Vacant	Ballycastle
Vacant	Carrigart and Dunfanaghy (with additional missional duties)
Vacant	Donegal and Stranorlar
Vacant	Fahan (with additional missional duties)
Vacant	Kells
Urban Mission	
Rev Rodney Cameron	St Colomba's, Lisburn
Rev Mervyn Gibson	Westbourne
Rev Lachlan Webster	Craigavon
Vacant	Belvoir
Vacant	Rathcoole
Vacant	Strand, Belfast
Vacant	Taughmonagh

32. It has been a busy period with progress made in several vacancies within the Home and Urban Mission. At the time of writing there were ten vacancies within the Home and Urban Mission.
33. Following the retirement of Rev Danny Rankin, the congregation of Strand was declared vacant, with leave to call now granted by the Linkage Commission and an application process in progress.

34. Rev David Curran was installed in the Home Mission and inducted into the charge of Wexford Church Development on 20 September 2024.
35. Rev Wallace Moore was ordained as a minister, installed in the Home Mission and inducted into the charge of Corbooy and Mullingar on 11 January 2025.
36. Rev Josh McCance was ordained as a minister, installed in the Home Mission and inducted into the charge of Donabate Associate, focusing on church development in Balbriggan, on 26 January 2025.
37. Rev Martin McNeely regrettably resigned from his charge of Fahan (with additional missional duties) on 23 March 2025 on medical grounds, with the Council remaining in prayer for him and his family. The Council is engaging with the congregation on next steps.
38. Following interviews and a unanimous indicative vote by congregation members, the Council has issued a call to Rev Dario Leal to the vacant charge of Carrigart and Dunfanaghy (with additional mission duties). A service of installation is planned for 25 May 2025.
39. Recommendations regarding the vacancy in Ballina and Killala were agreed in consultation with the Presbytery of Monaghan, with Leave to Call now granted for a Special Ministry Project in Ballina, which involves stated duties in the congregation(s).
40. The Council was represented on Presbytery Tenure Review Panels in both Dundalk and Sligo, as well as a consultation panel in Trinity Cork and Aghada.
41. An annual overnight gathering for Home Mission Ministers was held on 29–30 April 2025 in County Kildare, with Bible teaching from Rev Darran McCarriston and the Council Convener and his wife in attendance. Once again, there was an encouraging attendance.
42. Following a request from Kilkenny to exit the Home Mission Development Scheme at a suitable time, the Council engaged with both the congregation of Kilkenny and the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster in this regard. Having considered the sustainability of the congregation with regards to its leadership, finances and property, and confirmed local support via a congregational meeting and Presbytery resolution, the Council was able to recommend the exit of Kilkenny from the Home Mission on an agreed date, which was subsequently approved by the Linkage Commission.
43. The Mission Development Officer has been working with Home Mission congregations to enable their consideration of an appropriate pathway for their journey within the Home Mission. 46 congregations within the Home and Urban Mission have responded to the pathway questionnaire, which has enabled identification of support available from CMI and other councils relevant to the needs.
44. A team of mentors continues to offer accompaniment to Home Mission ministers if desired, with all ministers in new Home Mission charges assigned a mentor to offer them guidance and support.

45. The Council approved five individuals to the role of 'Mission Pioneer', with Mr Lewis McKelvey (Ballycastle), Mr Gary O'Rourke (The Village Project, South Belfast) and Mr David Gamble (Rathcoole) all deployed into new roles. Another cohort of applicants is currently being assessed by the Council and their respective Presbyteries.

IRISH MISSION WORKER AND DEACONESS PANEL

Directory of Irish mission workers and the location of their service (April 2025)

Name	Location
Tom Dowling	Kilkenny
Philip Whelton	Arklow

Directory of deaconesses and the location of their service (April 2025)

Name	Location
Sonya Anderson	Shore Street, Donaghadee
Paula Burrows	Ballygrainey
Rachel Cubitt	Whiteabbey
Louise Davidson	South Belfast Friendship House
Eleanor Drysdale	Wellington, Ballymena
Joanne Dunlop	Chaplaincy Team – Antrim & Craigavon Hospitals
Heidi England	Railway Street, Lisburn
Heather Healy	Fisherwick
Sharon Heron	International Meeting Point, Belfast
Roberta Irvine	Elmwood, Lisburn
Heather McCracken	Belfast Health and Social Care Trust with additional duties in chaplaincy in Musgrave Park Hospital
Tracey Nicholl	St James', Ballymoney
Hazel Reid	First Broughshane with additional duties in chaplaincy in Causeway Hospital
Sylvia Santos Bryce	West Church, Ballymena
Cathy Smith	First Holywood
Rosemary Spiers	Greenwell Street, Newtownards

46. The Irish Mission Worker and Deaconess Panel has continued to offer support to current Deaconesses and Irish Mission Workers, with the support of Helen Johnston.
47. Following 38 years of service, Mr Keith Preston retired as an Irish Mission Worker on 29 October 2024 and was thanked for his significant contribution to the mission of the church.
48. Having reached his normal retirement age on 24 May 2024, Mr Philip Whelton requested permission for an extension to his role for up to one more year, which was granted. Following the completion of this one-year extension, the Council confirmed his retirement date as 23 May 2025.
49. Following completion of their training, Miss Heather Healy and Mrs Cathy Smith became eligible for a deaconess call. New deaconess roles were identified in First Holywood and Fisherwick congregation and advertised amongst those eligible for these roles, with services of Commissioning and Induction held for Cathy Smith in First Holywood on 25 November 2024 and Heather Healy in Fisherwick on 1 December 2024.
50. Mrs Louise Davidson received a call to a deaconess role in South Belfast Friendship House, with a service of Induction being held on 11 May 2025.
51. The Three-Year Reviews for Deaconesses and Irish Mission Workers were re-started with a refreshed format, with reviews taking place for three deaconesses during April and May 2025.
52. A gathering for Irish Mission Workers, Deaconesses, Community Outreach Workers and Mission Project staff is planned for June 2025, with Very Rev Dr John Kirkpatrick speaking.
53. Under the guidance of the Deaconess Selection and Training Panel (CTM), a recruitment process for new trainee deaconesses was initiated with significant input from CMI, which will result in a recommendation from the Panel to the Council for Training in Ministry and a final report coming to the General Assembly from it in due course.

PAUL JAMIESON, Convener

INTERNATIONAL MEETING POINT MANAGEMENT PANEL

54. The International Meeting Point continues to be a significant good news story for the church and an excellent example of integral mission which is bearing much fruit. The Panel commends the entire IMP Project, including staff and volunteers, for their ongoing work.
55. Following the retirement of Mr Keith Preston, Rev Dr Colin Dickson has settled well into the role of Project Leader, approaching the work with energy, initiative and wisdom.
56. Other staffing roles within the Project have been filled, with Mr Avisai Suarez becoming the Domestic Coordinator on 16 December 2024

following the retirement of Mrs Jeanette Preston. Mr David Johnston began a new Support Worker role in North Belfast in February 2025 and Miss Ruth Annett has commenced a job share role as Op Shop Manager, under the employment of the North Belfast Presbytery.

57. The Panel appreciates the dedication and hard work of the whole IMP team, including a vast number of volunteers, as they engage with the increasing number of visitors and reach out through English classes, food provision, Bible studies, evangelistic courses and advice services.
58. The following new mission statement for the project was approved by the Panel: “The International Meeting Point seeks to love God and love the stranger in the city (Deut.10:19).” A framework document is also being finalised that has involved clarifying the core values and key principles to guide the operating procedures in existing locations and for any new work.
59. There is also gratitude to God for the ministry partnerships with Grace & Hope and South Kirk, in particular the vital support and ministry of Rev Ivan Steen and Rev Peter Burke.
60. Aware that the project is significantly supported through the Council’s United Appeal allocation, work has gone in to seeking additional income from external sources. This has been positive, with rental costs on the Lisburn Road now being fully covered by two generous donors. Thought continues to be given to other potential accommodation in South Belfast to reduce this burden.

STEPHEN SIMPSON, Convener

SOUTH BELFAST FRIENDSHIP HOUSE MANAGEMENT PANEL

61. The past year has seen positive developments to the work of South Belfast Friendship House, with a growing programme of activities reaching out to all ages, which has resulted in spiritual growth, particularly among women from the local community.
62. Mr Robert Dalzell continues in the role of Mission Project Leader, now released from formal duties in South Kirk Presbyterian to focus on the work of the Project.
63. Mrs Carol Reid resigned from the Children’s Worker post in December 2024, following the completion of her Maternity Leave. This role has been covered by Miss Abigail White, which was extended on a temporary basis to enable a period of reflection regarding staffing needs.
64. The Panel agreed to replace the previous full-time Children’s Worker role with two part-time roles, which would include a deaconess. A call has been issued to Louise Davidson to this role and recruitment is underway to source a part-time Children’s Outreach Worker on a 3-year contract.

65. New programme developments have included the commencement of an after-school drop-in for P7s and Year 8s, a women's bible study and a men's breakfast, with positive engagement particularly in the new adult programmes.
66. A PCI Impact Team helped to facilitate outreach activities among children and young people last summer. It is the intention of the Project Manager to recruit a team of volunteers for this year's summer outreach.
67. The Panel is indebted to PW for its ongoing prayerful and financial support of this project, as well as South Kirk Presbyterian for its practical support particularly in a men's breakfast initiative.

ELLEN HILLEN, Convener

WEST BELFAST SPECIAL MINISTRY MANAGEMENT PANEL

68. Progress in this Special Ministry Project continues to be encouraging, with the Core Team, led by Rev David Moore, building on connections already made and developing their programmes through a weekly bible study, monthly worship services and occasional connection events.
69. The team had involvement in a local festival in August 2024 which made some helpful connections in the area, with plans for similar engagement this summer already in progress.
70. Ms Toni Bassett continues in her part-time role as Community Outreach Worker, developing connections among migrant families in particular.
71. The financial footing of the project remains in a healthy position, with income through donations growing throughout the past year to the extent that the Panel was able to consider the addition of an Assistant Minister, which has been assigned by the Council of Training for Ministry.
72. The Panel encourages the wider church to pray for this developing work, particularly as thought begins to be given to possible premises that might offer a more visible presence in the area.

JOHN KIRKPATRICK, Convener

WEXFORD CHURCH DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PANEL

73. Following the induction of Rev David Curran to this project on 20 September 2024, initial focus was on connecting with former members of the closed congregations of Enniscorthy and Wexford, contributing to some local radio ministry opportunities and establishing a weekly small group bible study, as well as getting more familiarised with the local area and developing connections.

74. The previous church building has been used for some drop-in opportunities and a minor refurbishment of the space is being undertaken in order to host more regular outreach initiatives.
75. A Hope Explored Course was held in a local community centre in March 2025, which involved some door-to-door ministry in the area.
76. The Panel agreed to the development of a 'Ministry Reference Group' to provide support from those in closer proximity to help with local initiatives. The Secretary wrote to four Presbyterian congregations in the South-East of Ireland to request the involvement of a representative, with some progress made.
77. A prayer and information group has been established to help support this new work, along with a video highlighting the project being produced and shown at the Mission in Ireland events in March 2025. These have been well received and have helped to encourage prayerful and practical support going forward.
78. Looking forward, it is hoped that outreach work will continue, along with some one-off services of worship in the coming months.

MICHAEL ANDERSON, Convener

JOHNSTON LAMBE, Committee Convener

CHAPLAINCY COMMITTEE

79. This Committee has dealt with matters related to Healthcare and Prisons Chaplaincy, as well as receiving reports from Panels supporting Forces Chaplaincy, Rural Chaplaincy and Universities Chaplaincy, in line with the expanded remit of this newly-combined Chaplaincy Committee.
80. The Committee is deeply grateful for the work of all chaplains who continue to serve selflessly, seeking to provide as much support to them as possible as they carry out their valuable ministry.
81. Following consultation with a number of chaplains and reflection on the nature of their ministry more generally, the Committee has considered the vision, ethos and nature of Chaplaincy from a church-shaped perspective, aiming to offer a vision to the wider church for the missional opportunities that lie in this form of service. This report, "Chaplaincy: A Ministry of Presence" is included as Appendix 3.

Healthcare Chaplaincy

Directory of PCI Healthcare Chaplains and the location of their service (April 2025)

Name	Location
Rev Lindsay Blair	Lead Chaplain, Western Trust
Rev David Clarke	Sligo University Hospital & Mayo General Hospital
Rev Richie Cronin	Cork University Hospital
Joanne Dunlop	Antrim Area Hospital and Craigavon Hospital (Deaconess Assistant to Chaplain)
Rev Helen Freeburn	University Hospital, Galway
Rev John Gilkinson	Belfast City Hospital (full time)
Rev David Hagan	Craigavon Area Hospital
Rev Norman Harrison	Royal Group of Hospitals (PT) Northern Trust Lead Chaplain (PT)
Rev Stephen Hibbert	Altnagelvin Hospital
Rev Ross Kernoghan	Altnagelvin Hospital
Liz Lowrie	Coordinating Chaplain, Dublin Hospitals
Heather McCracken	Royal Group of Hospitals & Belfast City Hospital (Deaconess Assistant to the Chaplain) Musgrave Park Hospital – Chaplain (PT)
Rev Roger McElnea	Tyrone and Fermanagh
Rev Keith McIntyre	Daisy Hill Hospital
Rev Dr Ivan Neish	Antrim Area Hospital
Rev Jane Nelson	Omagh Hospital and Primary Care Complex
Rev Owen Patterson	Downe Hospital
Rev Jonathan Porter	Dundalk District Hospital (interim)
Rev Mark Proctor	Tallaght Hospital
Hazel Reid	Causeway Hospital, Coleraine
Claire Sellar	Ulster Hospital, Dundonald
Rev Marlene Taylor	Belfast Trust (Bank relief chaplain)

Rev Ivan Thompson	Bluestone Psychiatric Unit
Rev Alan Thompson	South Tyrone Hospital
Vacant	Letterkenny University Hospital

82. The Committee is most grateful to those healthcare chaplains who have recently retired from their responsibilities in healthcare chaplaincy, and welcomes those who have recently been appointed.
83. A Healthcare Chaplaincy Taster Day was held in October 2024 to highlight opportunities for relevant training and experience for those wishing to explore chaplaincy roles. There was a good attendance with helpful input from various contributors.
84. In September 2024, the Western Trust appointed Rev Lindsay Blair as their first Lead Chaplain, a composite role which involves the retention of a small number of hours per week as a Presbyterian Chaplain.
85. Correspondence from the Monaghan Presbytery indicated approval for Rev David Hagan taking on 10 hours per week in Palliative Care Chaplaincy in the Lagan Valley Hospital.
86. The Committee noted the retirement of Mrs Susan Dawson from her chaplaincy role in the Dublin and Munster Presbytery, thanking her for her service. The appointment of Mrs Liz Lowrie as Lead Chaplain in the Presbytery should be noted by ministers throughout the Republic of Ireland.
87. Following the retirement of Rev Jim Lamont from his role in Letterkenny University Hospital, it is encouraging to note the offer of a grant from the Hospital to the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal for the provision of Presbyterian Chaplaincy. The Presbytery is following up, with the support of CMI, to ensure appropriate chaplaincy provision for this context.
88. The Committee wishes to highlight that those considering healthcare chaplaincy are now required to obtain appropriate professional experience and qualifications.

Prisons Chaplaincy

Directory of PCI Prisons' Chaplains and the locations of their service. (April 2025)

Name	Location
Rev Alan Boal	Mountjoy, Dublin (part-time)
Rev Gary Aitcheson	HMP Magilligan (part time)
Rev Rodney Cameron	Hydebank Wood College and Women's Prison (part-time)
Rev Lesley-Ann Wilson	Woodland's Juvenile Justice Centre (part-time)
Rev Graham Stockdale	HMP Maghaberry (Coordinating Chaplain, full-time)

89. The Committee is encouraged by the work of prison chaplains, recognising the specific challenges that come with ministry in this context and positively noting spiritual encouragements.
90. Rev Graham Stockdale shared reflections with the Committee on the possibility of engaging in “beyond the walls” chaplaincy ministry among released prisoners as part of his role. This has been explored with representatives of the Northern Ireland Prison Service, alongside discussions in regard to the arrangements relating to the Coordinating Chaplaincy role at HMP Maghaberry.
91. Rev Gary Acheson stepped down from his role as part time chaplain at HMP Magilligan on 31 December, with the Committee expressing thanks for his work. Future chaplaincy arrangements at Magilligan are being considered as part of a larger discussion with the NIPS.
92. At Hydebank Wood and Women's Prison, Rev Rodney Cameron continues to serve as PCI chaplain, with a mechanism of appointment and accountability agreed to enable consideration of a long-standing volunteer taking on a more formalised and recognised role as ‘Assistant to the Chaplain’ in a non-stipendiary capacity.
93. It was reported to the Committee in February 2025 that correspondence had been received by Rev Lesley-Ann Wilson and the Presbytery of Ards that the chaplaincy arrangements at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre had been terminated. Being thankful for the fruitful work Rev Wilson had been engaged in, the Committee was disappointed by this development and offered support to the Presbytery of Ards in any future engagement with Woodlands.

FORCES CHAPLAINCY PANEL

Directory of Commissioned Chaplains within the Armed Forces (April 2025)

Name	Location
Rev James Burnett	Royal Navy Reserve (part-time)
Rev Mark Henderson	Army
Rev Ivan Linton	Army
Rev Graeme McConville	Army
Rev Michael McCormick	RAF
Rev Edward McKenzie	Army Reserve (part-time)
Rev Jonathan Newell	RAF
Rev Heather Rendell	Army
Rev Dr Paul Swinn	Army Reserve (part-time)
Rev Brent van der Linde	Royal Navy
Rev Dr Philip Wilson	Royal Air Force

Directory of part-time Chaplains to Youth Organisations sponsored by the Armed Forces

Name	Location
Rev Joseph Andrews	Air Training Corps
Rev Kenneth Crowe	Army Cadet Force (commissioned)
Rev Richard Graham	Air Training Corps
Rev Keith Hibbert	Army Cadet Force Chaplain
Rev Norman McDowell	Air Training Corps Chaplain
Rev Michael Rutledge	Air Training Corps
Rev Prof. Patton Taylor	Air Training Corps

94. The Panel maintains regular pastoral contact with serving forces chaplains through the Convener, with occasional input from some chaplains via MS Teams at Panel meetings.
95. The changing world of chaplaincy has been highlighted through a recent recruitment drive for non-religious chaplains, yet it is clear that PCI chaplains continue to be held in high regard as they operate in a variety of challenging contexts and grasp valuable opportunities for frontline mission, often away from their home and families for lengthy periods of time.

96. The Convener had opportunity to engage with several serving chaplains at a conference in September 2024, as well as represent the denomination at various chaplaincy consultation and advisory meetings throughout the year.
97. Some current serving chaplains had the opportunity to speak about their ministry with the cohort of current ministry students at Union Theological College in November 2024, which was welcomed by the Panel.
98. Work is underway to produce a new video for Remembrance Sunday that highlights Forces Chaplaincy.

ROB CRAIG, Convener

RURAL CHAPLAINCY PANEL

99. Following a review process, the Council agreed that the Rural Chaplaincy Pilot Project should be an ongoing Rural Chaplaincy Scheme. The four participating Presbyteries were informed and various representatives on the Panel were refreshed.
100. With the pilot project shifting to an ongoing scheme, a request to make the post of Rural Chaplain permanent was not accepted by the General Council, with the post instead extended for three years.
101. The Panel is encouraged by how the work of the Rural Chaplaincy team continues to develop, with new opportunities opening up to attend livestock marts, be present at local shows and host some evangelistic events.
102. The Rural Chaplain continues to be sought out pastorally by many from non-Presbyterian backgrounds and has maintained his involvement in a weekly Bible study in Hilltown.
103. Some of the articles from the 'Good News for the Countryside' column in the Farming Life are being re-purposed and collated into an evangelistic booklet.

ROBERT BELL, Chaplaincy Committee Co-Convener

UNIVERSITIES CHAPLAINCY PANEL

Directory of PCI Universities and Colleges Chaplains and locations of their service. (April 2025)

Name	Location
Rev Nigel Craig	QUB, Stranmillis and Union Theological College (full-time)
Rev Cheryl Meban	UU, Belfast (full-time)
Rev Dr J Coulter	UU, Coleraine (part-time)
Rev Graeme Orr	UU, Magee (part-time)
Rev Helen Freeburn	University College, Galway (part-time)
Rev Dr Keith McCrory	NUI, Maynooth (part-time)
TBC	Trinity College Dublin

104. Within the new Committee structures, University Chaplaincy is now overseen by a Panel, which reports to the Chaplaincy Committee. The Panel continues to affirm the strategic nature of university chaplaincy and the important role chaplains have as they engage in mission among students and staff in this context.
105. At Queen's University Belfast, the chaplaincy team has continued to serve well in challenging circumstances. The 'Vital' teaching programme on Sunday nights in Derryvolgie Halls has been well attended, with some special events also organised alongside the regular discipleship groups, outreach opportunities and pastoral engagement with students.
106. The focus of Rev Cheryl Meban's work as a Chaplain at UUB has been on pastoral care, along with involvement in student lunches and new initiatives such as a Tearfund course and a student walking group. The Panel refined her annual goals, suggesting ways to boost visibility and student engagement, particularly reflecting on the balance between mission and pastoral care.
107. Part-time chaplains continue to grasp opportunities within their context within timeframe limitations. The Panel developed a paper offering best practice guidance for part-time university chaplaincy roles, which has been shared with all part-time chaplains.
108. Following a recruitment process, the Committee approved the nomination of Rev Gerry Clinton (Ballybay) to the role of part-time Chaplain in Trinity College, Dublin. The Council is engaging with TCD staff on the completion of necessary university processes to enable commencement.

CRAIG LYNN, Convener

Police Chaplaincy Pilot Scheme

109. Recent correspondence with ministers who were involved in the pilot scheme in North Down and Ards, and with Mr Stephen Carroll, an Elder in St Andrew's Bangor, indicates that this matter is once again being considered more actively at the level of Senior PSNI management, and that there is some reason to feel that there may be positive developments.

ROBERT BELL AND CRAIG LYNN, Committee Co-Conveners

GENERAL PURPOSES PANEL

110. The Panel's remit is the oversight of CMI finance and the monitoring and management of all aspects of the Council's property portfolio.
111. With regards to Finance, this includes the review of quarterly management accounts, the preparation of annual accounts for presentation to the Council and the General Assembly, consideration of the finances of major revenue (repairs) and capital projects, and the preparation of budgets for annual submission to the United Appeal Committee.
112. For Property, this includes acquisitions, maintenance and disposals within the Home Mission and Mission Projects, as well as the assessment of CMI Property Repair Grant applications and CMI Capital Grant applications, and their allocation, within the Home and Urban Mission.
113. To enact its remit, Property Agent (Rev Alan McQuade) and Finance Agent (Mrs Elizabeth Moffett) report to the Panel to ensure effective oversight of these areas and transact more urgent or routine matters between meetings. In addition, the Derryvolgie and Elmwood Avenue Sub-group reports to the Panel twice annually on matters of finance and property.
114. The Panel acknowledges the tireless and efficient work of Mrs Lindsay Munro as Finance Manager and Mr Graham Patterson as Property Manager.

**THE DERRYVOLGIE AND ELMWOOD AVENUE
MANAGEMENT PANEL**

115. Derryvolgie Halls continue to operate with a full complement of students and are meeting all costs, with the outstanding overdraft now cleared. Fees were held at the same price last year and a potential increase of fees for next year will be considered soon.
116. All offices continue to be occupied in Elmwood Avenue, with the 'Sojourn' coffee shop tenant on the ground floor proving a beneficial addition, both in terms of income and student footfall.

117. Financial arrangements in Elmwood Avenue have moved to a more positive situation following some service charge adjustments and annual rent from the ground-floor tenant.

ALAN MCQUADE, Convener

Property matters

118. The Panel has continued to support a number of Home and Urban Mission congregations with a variety of building and property requirements. With significant professional expertise and experience within its membership, the Panel has offered guidance in relation to potential building projects, minor refurbishments, general building repairs and property valuations for acquisition and disposal of meeting houses, halls and manses.
119. The Panel was encouraged by the completion of the project in Maynooth, with the new facilities opened in September 2024 providing significant encouragement to the congregation.
120. The congregation of Donabate completed the purchase of a property to enable the development of the church planting work in Balbriggan, with the support of a significant CMI capital grant.
121. The Panel supported the congregation of Fahan in the purchase of a manse, which is due to complete imminently.
122. The sale of the former Enniscorthy meeting house was completed, helping to offset costs for the purchase of a new manse in Wexford.
123. Sale has been agreed on lands connected to the former Ballymote congregation and is currently in process.
124. Necessary repair work has been undertaken to the meeting house in Tullamore with the support of a significant CMI repair grant in addition to significant local grant funding.
125. A schedule of works has been prepared to make the halls of Trinity Cork structurally sound, improve the heating system and include a draught lobby. The congregation is in the process of seeking additional funding from local Trusts or Foundations to help meet the anticipated costs and reduce its request to CMI.
126. In Galway, the congregation has forwarded a project brief to an architect for a fee proposal, guided by representatives of the Panel. Progress is being made on the transference of title from MCI to PCI, with it hoped the next steps can be determined soon. Additional work was completed on the manse.
127. CMI intends to engage with the Presbytery of Monaghan with a view to selling the former meeting house in Carrickmacross.
128. Property repair grants were approved for minor works in the congregation of Corboy, the completion of a technical report on the Ballina meeting house, the installation of a new AV system in Galway and proposed works in the Wexford meeting house.

129. The Panel is preparing best practice guidance notes for congregational property management of Home Mission and Urban Mission congregations. In addition, the Panel agreed that a covering letter and property questionnaire seeking to ascertain the general condition of congregational properties within the Home Mission be transmitted to such congregations within the Derry and Donegal Presbytery as a trial, before it is rolled out to all Home and Urban Mission congregations.

Financial matters

130. The Panel is pleased to report that the Council's accounts came within budget for 2024, finishing with a small surplus. This does not include the Capital costs which showed a deficit due to the project in Maynooth spilling into the next financial year.
131. Following the significant grant to Maynooth, the Capital Fund balance has begun to be replenished through the sale of a former Irish Mission Worker's house in Dublin and the former Enniscorthy meeting house and manse.
132. Some budgetary adjustments were necessary for 2025 following a reduction in the United Appeal grant for 2025 from the requested amount.
133. A number of grants were made for property repairs and mission projects, which are detailed elsewhere in the Council's report.
134. The Panel approved a 3.5% salary increase for all Irish Mission Workers, Deaconesses, and employed staff working in CMI Mission Projects, in line with General Council recommendations.
135. It was agreed that any property grants likely to be over £100,000 should be referred to the Strategy for Mission Committee for approval in light of CMI's missional priorities.
136. The Panel agreed to the Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee's proposal for the Council to contribute €25,000 pa for 5 years to the Ballina Special Ministry Project drawing on funds from the sale of lands associated with the former Ballymote congregation.
137. It was agreed that the part-time university chaplaincy post in Trinity College Dublin would be financed from the Southern Association Widows Fund.
138. The Council continues to be extremely grateful for the support of the United Appeal for Mission in enabling so much of the work outlined in this report. Thanks are also expressed to PW for its continued financial support.

HUGO WILSON, Convener

APPENDIX 1

A DECADE TO PLANT: 10 + 10 IN 10

Introduction

As a denomination, the need for revitalisation of existing churches and reconfiguration of current charges is understood, however the development of new churches is also of strategic importance to help reimagine the future. Indeed, the 2024 General Assembly passed a paper on the Reconfiguration of Ministry, stating “new church development is a heightened priority for the denomination.”

The General Assembly has also affirmed and adopted a new church planting handbook from the Council for Mission in Ireland, which offers a pathway for congregations and individuals seeking to be involved in church planting. That handbook recognised the need for PCI to recapture its church-planting DNA, through establishing new communities of faith that enable people to encounter Jesus in places where the church is not currently present. While there have been some examples of church planting within PCI in the previous two decades, the Church Planting Panel wishes to see that which has been sporadic become more habitual in the next decade. The Panel is praying for such growth of this vision across this island that it impacts major towns and cities, reaches southerly and westerly and plays its part in the revitalisation and renewal of the church’s witness in Ireland.

To that end, the period of the next ten years should be understood as a decade of sowing and planting as a denomination, in order that a future harvest might be reaped. For clarity, the focus of such sowing and planting should be on developing missionally-minded, Gospel-centred communities of worship, with a focus on the Republic of Ireland when it comes to the use of central resources.

Strategy

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. 9 For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.” 1 Corinthians 3:5–9

The following strands will shape the Council’s strategic work in this area:

(a) Churches Planting Churches

It is the Council’s belief that the most effective church planting happens through churches who plant churches. The primary emphasis of this strategy will involve the identification of ‘islands of strength’ that can

help to resource and support new church development elsewhere. Where such initiative comes at a local level, the Council will seek to offer support and guidance, with financial resource offered where it is deemed necessary or strategically important. The Council will only manage a church plant centrally where local support lacks and the need is viewed as a high priority.

(b) **A strategic geographical focus**

While there are needs across the whole of this land, having the presence of a church in every country road or urban estate will not be possible. Going to where the people are should be a central tenet of any missional strategy rather than expecting people to come to us. Given this, the Council has done work on updating the list of the top 50 population centres in Ireland to help guide its thinking.

While the Council's emphasis remains on planting from 'islands of strength' as the normative pattern, it acknowledges the necessity for church planting in some major towns in the south or west of Ireland where no obvious island of strength exists. In such cases, new church planting may develop within major centres of population which currently lack in strong reformed witness or where Presbyterian witness has dwindled or died out in more recent years.

As new works may emerge from all Presbyteries in the years ahead, given that only 10% of PCI congregations are found within Leinster, Munster and Connacht and only two Presbyteries currently touch these provinces, there should be a prioritisation of central resource towards church planting in such areas. Given this, the Council will seek to draw alongside congregations in the Republic of Ireland to help envision them to be involved in church planting. Given the reality that many communities in Ireland aren't easily accessed by any existing PCI congregations, there may be a need for some centralised church planting initiatives, particularly further south or west in Ireland. These will be carefully considered, of strategic priority and done in consultation with Presbytery.

(c) **Grounded in prayer and focused on people**

Prayer shouldn't be seen as an add-on to the strategy but as part of the strategy itself. Where our presence lacks and church development is needed, even without practical action, our first call will be to pray to the Lord of the harvest. As a Council, it is vital to be mindful of the need to depend upon God, aware that without the working of His Spirit, nothing of eternal value can be achieved. As targets are set and strategic plans developed, it is good to remember that unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. It is in this context that this report calls on the church to prayerfully reflect on the target being set before it while being mindful of the need to humbly depend on God, shown best through prayer.

Any church planting work is also done by God's people in order to reach more people with the Gospel. Church development is not a paper exercise but primarily involves people. The Council's Church

Planting Handbook focuses thinking in this direction, particularly in outlining who can be involved in church planting and how.

(d) **Supporting Presbyteries**

A key pillar of the Reconfiguration of Ministry report approved by the 2024 General Assembly encourages each of the 19 Presbyteries to consider what areas of their Presbytery are not being reached or might offer a priority in terms of new church development. As this work is constructed and outworked, it is hoped that at least 19 new church development projects could emerge in the years ahead. The initial ownership in this will lie with Presbyteries, but they may require additional support whether that be with strategy, guidance, finance or personnel.

Specific target: 10 + 10 In 10

The Council has so far resisted placing a measurable target upon church planting in the denomination, however it feels this may be a time where a specific and timebound figure could help to both motivate the church and offer a sense of accountability in working towards it. Of course, it should be emphasised that while one can sow, plant and water, it is only God who makes things grow. This should produce a deep reliance on the Lord far above any aspiration or targets. However, while operating with such a reliance, the Council also takes seriously its responsibility to envision, sow and plant, and that sense of responsibility for this part of God's vineyard has led to the development of a church planting target for the next 10 years of the life of the denomination.

It should be stated that the goal of any new church planting work is to see the establishment of not just a healthy worshipping community in the future, but also to work towards the constitution of a congregation within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. Given that, and with the acknowledgement that there are some church planting projects currently underway within the denomination, the target for new church development aims to reflect that.

Therefore, it is the Council's aim and prayer that in the next decade (2025–2035), at least twenty new church plants will be established, with the majority of them based in the areas of Ireland that currently lack a strong presence. Included in this figure will be currently established church planting works that are not yet constituted as congregations. So, to nuance this further, the Council wants to work towards enabling and supporting the constituting of 10 new Presbyterian congregations by 2035. In addition to this it also wants to work towards the development of 10 new church planting projects that have yet to be imagined or commenced.

Therefore, the goal is for at least 10 fully constituted new churches plus at least 10 more church planting projects in the next 10 years.

Recommendations

1. That a church planting goal is set before the denomination to pray for and work towards at least 10 fully constituted new churches plus at least 10 more church planting projects in the next 10 years.
2. That the Council for Mission in Ireland (CMI) gives strategic focus to church planting in centres of population that lack in strong reformed witness, with particular emphasis on new church development that enhances our witness in major cities and towns of Ireland.
3. That CMI prioritises church planting in Leinster, Munster and Connacht in its financial support, both via the resourcing of current congregations in church planting work and occasional Council-led church development.
4. As Presbytery Reconfiguration plans emerge, that capacity be given to support their church planting priorities in terms of the Council's staff time and strategic guidance, and that CMI awaits the outcome of the General Council's work in relation to additional finance which may be allocated to pioneer work, as recommended within the Reconfiguration of Ministry report.
5. That the Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee engages with representatives from the Linkage Commission to help clarify what key steps are involved in moving from a planting phase to congregational constitution phase, in order for CMI to offer guidance to such works.

APPENDIX 2

MISSION AS A MINORITY

Crossing boundaries

A Task Group was established by the Strategy for Mission Coordination Committee with a remit to research and reflect on helpful principles and practices for the effective mission of our Church in areas where Presbyterians represent a significant minority and the community is predominantly culturally Roman Catholic. In doing so, the Task Group sought to develop recommendations that could be reflected on by the church, and shared or actioned more widely in due course as appropriate.

It is important to state from the outset, that this report is offered to the Church to enable self-reflection on its posture, rather than seeking to point out error or correct the thinking of other traditions of faith. While holding firmly to our beliefs as a Reformed church, it must be acknowledged that, at times, a tendency to embrace practices that are primarily cultural rather than biblical or Gospel-shaped has hindered rather than helped our witness within a divided society. Therefore, in doing this thinking, the primary posture of this report has been to consider what requires reflection within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, above telling others how they should change.

This report is framed in the context of ‘crossing boundaries’, reminding us that the starting point for mission is going, rather than expecting others to come. This motif is strongly reflected throughout the Bible, from the command to Abram in Genesis 12 to leave his people and his father’s household, to the Great Commission where Jesus calls his disciples to go and make disciples of every nation, which is then played out in the book of Acts as the expansion of the church is seen in all kinds of surprising places. Of course, the concept of crossing boundaries is captured best of all in the incarnation, as the Lord crossed the boundary from heaven to earth in Christ, coming to dwell among humanity, displaying a perfect example in how he lived and ultimately offering a path for all to come to relationship with him through his death and resurrection. This is a reminder that we follow a boundary-crossing God and join in his mission.

Mission as a minority

The context that this report seeks to generally address concerns areas where Presbyterians once enjoyed a more equal or majority presence, but which has now changed to a minority status. As such, the examples researched were mainly drawn from within Northern Ireland, with a couple of exceptions. This has been helpful to reflect upon in a context of a changing landscape where the church continues to learn about the reality of ministering within a divided society. However, it is important to recognise that this has been the dominant reality for congregations in the Republic of Ireland, who have been ministering as a minority for many

years. Rather than highlighting any particular scenario, the church as a whole would do well to reflect on how, in many situations, this reality has not hindered the church's witness in such contexts, and there is much to learn from brothers and sisters across Ireland who, for some time, have modelled the postures this report will speak of. Interestingly, statistics show that of 19 Presbyteries, the only one to have grown in the last 10 years is the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster.

According to the 2021 Northern Ireland Census, while remaining the largest Protestant denomination in NI, Presbyterians represent 16.6% of the population and, as a denomination, are one third smaller than 50 years ago among an increasing population. In 2021 those identifying as Catholic exceeded those doing so as Protestant for the first time, trends that are likely to continue in the immediate future. To those with eyes to see, much has changed. Those identifying as Protestant are no longer a majority in many towns and neighbourhoods. In this context, it is difficult to expect the patterns of church life and activity of the past to be appropriate to the future, at least in regards to mission to those around us. What does the Gospel call us to do?

The narrative of Scripture shows that ministry as a minority is the normal pattern for the people of God, in contrast to recent experiences of privileged majority status. Being a minority is the everyday reality for most of our brothers and sisters across the world where they are surrounded by populations dominated by other religions or political ideologies, many of which are opposed to the Gospel. Has this led to the end of the church? By no means, rather often it has led to the growth of the church. For many Christians across the world today, it is an everyday reality to be a minority group within their culture, yet in many of these places the church still maintains its missional vision. Perhaps PCI is learning to do the same. PCI's congregations in the Republic of Ireland teach us about living as witnesses of Christ, where they make up 0.47% of the population, according to the 2016 census. Worldwide and within Ireland, the church has lessons for us to reflect on, and no better time to begin to learn them than now.

This report seeks to help the church look up and out at the context around us and offer some practical ways in which to grasp such opportunities. A helpful starting point was reflecting on existing practice within PCI where congregations and individuals are engaging in mission as a minority. A number of individuals were identified and invited to share what they are doing in terms of outreach and also to highlight any principles or practices in their approach. In addition to this research, two events took place to allow wider input from the denomination. An event in April 2024 hosted by the Moderator, 'Confident as a Minority', gave an opportunity for representatives from each Presbytery to contribute to this conversation. A forum event in November 2024 allowed those actively engaged in mission as a minority to reflect and respond to an initial report which enabled the cross-fertilisation of ideas and learning. The insights and learning from both events were integrated into this report. What follows is a summary of this research including a number of identified principles and associated practices.

Principles and practices

1. **THE GOSPEL IS FOR ALL:** An understanding that God has no favourites and that his commission compels us to go and share the hope of the Gospel with others. The invitation to follow Jesus is the most attractive thing the world has ever seen and should be offered to all people regardless of background, culture, community or religion. Practices to embed this are:
 - (a) **Bridge-building:** Accept that the church has too often stayed within a silo expecting that people will come. Effective mission as a minority will understand the need to build bridges of connection into the community around us.
 - (b) **Intentional:** Understand that our purpose is to point to Jesus, taking opportunities, where appropriate, to move conversations in a spiritual direction.
 - (c) **Teaching:** Regularly remind church members of the church's responsibility to be a witness to the community and neighbours through preaching and teaching.
 - (d) **Consider the cost:** The church should regularly reflect upon whether there are things it does that may be a barrier when engaging in mission as a minority. What cultural or secondary practices could be set aside for the sake of the Gospel?

2. **CHRIST IS LORD OVER EVERY CULTURE:** Respect the culture around us by valuing everyone we encounter, interacting with them in a way that builds credibility and may open other doors. Understand that some cultural practices are spiritually neutral and follow the apostle Paul's approach to mission when he became "all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Cor 9:22). Recognise that the journey from 'no faith' to 'faith' can be culturally easier than, for example, a journey from nominal Catholicism to worshipping in a Presbyterian church. Practices to embed this are:
 - (a) **History:** Listen to historical or political perspectives without argument or judgement.
 - (b) **Worship:** Seek to remove displays of political or national identity from public worship, knowing that our primary spiritual identity is rooted in allegiance to Jesus Christ alone.
 - (c) **Value the Irish language:** Appreciate the Irish language, even learning it at a basic level.
 - (d) **Local:** Seek to build local fellowship rather than importing outsiders into the area to boost numbers.
 - (e) **Practices:** Find common ground in religious practices that are still respected in the Catholic community such as prayer, baptism and the Bible.

- (f) **Language:** Consider the language used, seeking to clearly explain how a person is saved by grace in a way that is free from religious jargon. Be aware that in some contexts the word 'Presbyterian' may have negative political and cultural associations whilst in other places it is warmly received.
 - (g) **Resources/Literature:** Use resources that are appropriate to the cultural context e.g., Evangelistic tools tailored around St Patrick or CCLW's upcoming rural resource.
3. **THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING PRAYERFUL:** Any missional work should grow from a place of prayer and dependence upon God for the work to prosper. This is God's work and he is often doing more than can be seen. His grace falls everywhere so pray for all parts of the community. Practices to embed this are:
- (a) **Prayer meeting:** Organise opportunities for others to gather for prayer for the work.
 - (b) **Prayer walking:** Regularly prayer walk the community you are seeking to reach.
 - (c) **Resourcing:** Provide regular updates to interested people and create opportunities for wider prayer support.
 - (d) **Offer prayer:** Look for ways to naturally offer prayer to people you are interacting with.
4. **THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING BIBLE FOCUSED:** Be confident in God and his Word. Make the Bible central and a key part of relational building and programming. Practices to embed this are:
- (a) **Bible study group:** Establish an opportunity for people to engage with the Bible. This could be a weekly or monthly group who work through a book of the Bible or use a resource. Use neutral premises if available.
 - (b) **One-to-one Bible study:** Personally invite individuals to read and study the Bible with you if desired.
 - (c) **Informally:** Look for ways to naturally open the Bible or introduce God's wisdom into a conversation or meeting.
5. **THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL CHURCH COMMUNITY:** Build a community that makes the Gospel visible and compelling, knowing that mission isn't merely an individual endeavour but one that is enhanced by a church community. Practices to embed this are:
- (a) **Hospitality:** Integrate regular opportunities for sharing food together.
 - (b) **Start small:** Keep it simple and don't over-programme.

- (c) **One big family:** Don't always segregate by age, gender or interest.
 - (d) **Communication:** Find ways to make the church more visible to the wider community such as an outside noticeboard, social media and service recordings.
6. **THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING RELATIONAL:** Friendship should be real and genuine and does not always equal agreement. In some communities there will be a lot of mistrust and suspicion to break down. This is a long slow work and quick results shouldn't be expected. Be a consistent, regular presence over time, to help enable the building of trust. Practices to embed this are:
- (a) **Initiate:** Be intentional and take the first step in building friendships with others carefully and slowly in an unforced way.
 - (b) **Love:** Treat people as individuals and love and serve them well through acts of kindness.
 - (c) **Honesty:** Be honest about who you are and why you are doing what you are doing.
 - (d) **Invite:** Regularly invite people to programmes, events or services. Set high standards and live expectantly.
 - (e) **Door-to-door:** Build connection, offer literature, invitations to events, bilingual calendar (English and Irish).
 - (f) **Events/Activities:** Use obvious cultural and community events such as a St. Patrick's Day parade, community carol singing, Christmas card drop to every home, outreach events, harvest services, storytelling the Bible events.
7. **THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A CLEAR VISION:** It will be important to have clarity on initial steps, while holding lightly what might develop as the Lord makes it clear. Seek clarity on the definition of this work, whether that be a Bible study, an outreach project, a church plant or something else. This will help shape the beliefs and principles that are important and define the way that anyone involved in this work should live by and commit to. Practices to embed this are:
- (a) **Write it down:** Write down a set of vision and values.
 - (b) **Repeat it:** Share the vision with others and remind people of it often.
8. **THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING A TEAM:** This is crucial to draw out the gifts of others and grow capacity for any work. Effective mission is not a solo task. Practices to embed this are:
- (a) **Identify people:** Those who share the vision and are willing to commit to the values.

- (b) **Equip:** Train core team members and the whole congregation how to be a witness and share their faith with others.
9. **THE IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING PARTNERSHIP:** Who else is serving the community? This can be other PCI congregations or like-minded churches, kingdom partnerships with others engaged in Gospel work in the area, or community-based initiatives, or groups who could be door-openers into the local community. Practices to embed this are:
- (a) **Serving others:** Reach out to local groups, schools (assemblies), community groups, and seek ways to serve in the community for example through sports coaching with a local club, engaging with the GAA or being present at livestock markets.
- (b) **Being served:** Look out for groups in the community that can support the work in positive ways such as the provision of neutral facilities to meet such as schools, sports clubs or community centres.
10. **THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPONDING TO LOCAL NEEDS:** Get to know the community and its needs, and look to respond and serve in realistic ways. A practice to embed this could be carrying out a community listening process to identify local needs. This could lead to initiatives in some of the following areas:
- (a) **Social and wellbeing needs:** Foodbank provision, mental health awareness.
- (b) **Children and families:** Holiday Bible Club, parent and toddler groups, youth clubs.
- (c) **Migrant ministry:** English language or conversation classes and home visitation.
- (d) **Neutral space:** Identifying a venue in the community that could offer a drop-in café or warm space away from a traditional church building.

Barriers To Crossing Boundaries

The Task Group acknowledges that every context is unique and has its own challenges for mission. As such, the principles and practices offered are not prescriptive but intended as guidance that can be reflected upon and shaped at a local level. In so doing, it is helpful to be aware of the following cultural attitudes that may be present in a congregation or area that can become barriers to crossing boundaries.

- (a) **We don't want to – it's too painful.**
- **Legacy:** Hurts and trauma that are still painful. Respect for victims in the community.
 - **Trust:** An inherent sectarianism or deep mistrust of others.

- (b) **We don't need to – complacency with Gospel.**
- **Religious tradition:** 'I was brought up a Catholic, I might not go but I'm still a Catholic'
 - **Mindset:** Fixed mindset that congregations only see Protestant people as their mission field.
 - **Divided society:** Closed single identity communities – people never leave their area. Relationship building is limited due to societal barriers such as most schools being non-integrated.
- (c) **We don't know how to – uncertainty or feeling ill-equipped.**
- **Fears and prejudices:** The Gospel breaks barriers down. Our identity may be too deeply linked to an inherited Protestant culture which can narrow vision. How can the Bible be taught in ways that help people find their identity in Christ?
 - **Theology:** There may be a lack of understanding of who is being reached and their theology of how to get to heaven. Cultural Protestants and cultural Catholics often believe the same things.
 - **Experience:** A lack of experience with others and a lack of awareness of fruitful models of mission in this area.
- (d) **We wish we didn't have to – we're Presbyterians, this is not our job.**
- **Barriers within our own community:** Sometimes there are barriers between two Presbyterian congregations in the same town which is a poor witness. Other barriers can be class. Newcomers bring barriers but also opportunities. A primary loyalty to Christ needs to shape an attitude to mission in a way that transcends loyalties to other organisations which have traditionally been influential within a community.
 - **Apathy:** The only missional priority is to reach the small minority of Protestant people remaining.

There can be no doubt that mission in areas where the community is predominantly culturally Catholic, presents a complex challenge. However, seeking to overcome the barriers noted above through courageous leadership within a congregation, while also seeking to live out the principles and practices listed in this report, could be a small start yet go a long way in crossing cultural boundaries. With much prayer and patience, may the Lord widen vision and practice in local mission and that, with the Spirit's help, empower and equip the church to cross boundaries in ways that enable it to thrive in its mission and grow in its reach.

Recommendations

Following the research and the principles and practices identified, the Task Group makes the following recommendations:

1. That the principles and practices outlined are affirmed as a helpful missional posture in areas where Presbyterians are a significant minority, and made more accessible in a printed report.
2. That the Council considers it a strategic priority to work with Presbyteries in identifying particular areas within their bounds where they could be more missionally present.
3. That the report is shared with the Linkage Commission for it to consider how it relates to its work.
4. That the report is shared with the Council for Training in Ministry and the Council of Congregational Life & Witness for their own consideration as it relates to their outputs of ministry training and congregational resourcing.

APPENDIX 3

CHAPLAINCY – A MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

Background

The range of chaplaincy roles that comes under the remit of the Council for Mission in Ireland (CMI) is extensive. With healthcare, prisons, universities, the armed forces and the rural community all included, the scope of our chaplaincy provision as a church is both wide-ranging and far-reaching. However, as the Council support chaplains in such a vast arena, is it clear about what it understands chaplaincy to be? In taking our place within secular institutions or settings through chaplaincy, what kind of ethos will enhance our presence and what distinctives will maintain the witness of Christ in an ever-changing society?

The CMI Chaplaincy Committee has sought to consider these issues and shape an ethos for chaplaincy in order to underpin its value and clarify its function to usefully support the variety of chaplains serving on behalf of our denomination. In doing so, every chaplain was invited to submit written responses to a set of questions, which was further developed by a discussion involving a range of chaplains from each area of the Council's remit and reflections offered by each Chaplaincy Panel. While a wide range of reflections were submitted, common themes emerged that are captured in this report to offer a clear vision on the need for chaplaincy and a blueprint to define our ethos as a church in chaplaincy.¹

A vision for chaplaincy: care, presence and hope

This report seeks to affirm the value of chaplaincy as being both pastoral and missional. In doing so, it outlines that the ministry of chaplaincy offers care for the church, a presence in society and a missional intention to offer a reason for the hope professed in Jesus Christ.

1. Care for the church: Continuing connection with displaced people.

Chaplaincy offers an opportunity to engage with people in acute life circumstances and unique seasons of life. Whether a hospital bed, university campus or prison cell, many chaplaincy settings are temporary landing places rather than long-term destinations. This means that chaplaincy can often be fluid, transient and temporary, with at times only fleeting conversations with those passing through.

¹ As per the remit of the Council for Mission in Ireland, this report focuses on chaplaincy within the settings of Healthcare, Prisons, Forces, Universities and the Rural community. While other chaplaincy settings such as sport or business are recognised and there may be some crossover in terms of principles or practices in what follows, these settings are not reflected on within the report. That being said, it should be noted that while PCI has no formal involvement in Sports Chaplaincy, there are significant numbers of volunteer chaplains who are Presbyterian working with sports clubs in Ireland, something that the Council welcomes.

In such settings, a chaplain's role will be to provide spiritual support to all who seek it, but there is also a significant opportunity for the church to maintain connection with its own people, particularly those who have been displaced or removed from their congregational involvement for a season due to illness, education, war or other factors.

While there is a recognition that many institutions are less likely to accept denominational chaplaincy and an understanding that almost all chaplains work within multi-disciplinary and inter-denominational teams, it should also be noted that many chaplains are engaging with both current and lapsed members of congregations in their various settings. This is one reason for why the sending of chaplains to minister at a bedside, connect with a student or be present in a military unit is a vital part of a lifelong journey with people from the cradle to the grave.

It is also important to recognise that chaplaincy plays an important role in supporting both staff and families, often to support Christians within their workplace or draw alongside anxious or hurting families at specific points of struggle.

2. **Presence in society: Pastoral presence and care to all who seek it.**

The most common description of chaplaincy that emerged is that of it being 'a ministry of presence'. Eugene Peterson's rendering of John 1:14 points to how "the Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood" and reminds the church of its need to be present in places where it may find it more difficult to be. While the public profile of religion is downplayed and the place of the institutional church in society has declined, chaplaincy presents an opportunity for the church to 'move into the neighbourhood', engage in the public square and connect with a broad spectrum of people around us.

With the majority of chaplaincy ministry taking place in institutional or secular settings, it offers a way for the church to provide a pastoral presence in places that seem more out of the reach of local congregations. Such incarnational ministry is not for the faint-hearted as chaplains are visible representatives of the Gospel, in non-church-like situations. This is a ministry of presence, as chaplains seek to draw alongside people in a pastoral way, take time to identify and be with people. They facilitate people being able to talk about Jesus, know his presence and sense his strength.

In a book called, *Foundations of Chaplaincy: A Practical Guide*, retired military chaplain Alan T. Baker, remarks that "more than anything else, chaplaincy is being present among those you serve: crying, laughing, worshipping, celebrating, mourning, storytelling and comforting." It is vital the church continues to grasp the opportunity to be present in the public sphere in such ways, while it is still invited to do so.

3. **Missional intent: Offering a reason for the hope professed.**

The missional God sends us into the world to go and make disciples. Given that a Christian chaplain will encounter people at different stages of faith awareness or growth, this could involve planting seeds as pastoral evangelists to create awareness of God and the value of His Word, or ministering to those who may have a mature faith but need specific care or support in a particular season or stage of life. A 2015 Theos Think Tank report suggested that the “proverbial man in the street [is] more likely to meet a chaplain in his daily life... as he is to meet any formal religious figure.” In spending a day with a Prison Chaplain, for example, one might be surprised by the amount of spiritually-based conversations that come their way.

The book of Acts shows how the Apostles consistently found fresh ways to share the story of Christ in different contexts. In Athens, Paul both roamed the marketplace and reasoned in the synagogue, referencing Greek poetry and the gods they worshipped while arguing persuasively. He used various settings for ministry, such as a river bank in Philippi and a home in Corinth. In each place, he incorporated his ministry in culturally appropriate ways, remaining fixed on the message but flexible in his methods. This missional flexibility is seen in chaplaincy today as at hospital bedsides, operational military units, busy farmers’ marts, isolated prison cells, or eclectic university campuses, are a myriad of modern-day missionaries sent by the church to sensitively offer reason for the hope of Christ.

At a time where roles for non-religious chaplains are being developed within some institutions, it is of vital importance that the church maintains its vision of the spiritual dimension of chaplaincy. This is still understood in a healthcare setting for example, where alongside physical care, the provision of spiritual care is seen as vitally important, offering strong impetus for the church’s involvement.

The nature of chaplaincy

Given the range of settings chaplaincy is delivered in, there can be many differing understandings of its nature. While the responses from chaplains pointed out various distinctives, the following pictures emerged to help capture the nature of chaplaincy.

(a) **An away match: Playing on someone else’s terms**

The sporting analogy of a team playing an ‘away match’ describes the essence of chaplaincy. When a team plays away from home, it has to learn to operate and thrive on someone else’s turf. It might be less familiar there, with much less control over the conditions or terms of engagement. Without the ability to set the parameters or lay out the pitch, one must adapt to the environment in order to perform well.

This is a helpful image for chaplaincy, as the church sends out those who will engage on terms laid out by others within secular institutions or organisations, and be able to cope well within such settings in winsome ways while also being true to both the faith they carry and the church they represent. While some questions might exist at senior decision-making levels of many of the institutions where chaplains are present, it appears that chaplains are well-received, on the whole, by those they are dealing with ‘on the ground’, be they patients, inmates, soldiers, students or farmers. Many chaplains spoke of being highly respected within their roles with “even the reluctant being surprised by the care they receive in a time of crisis.” This requires a sensitive approach and one that takes the long-view, seeking to be in the right place, at the right time, in the right manner, listening closely and offering kindness. Then trust may be earned to say the right thing, whether comfortable or unpalatable.

(b) **A bridge: Creating connection**

A bridge offers connection between two items that would be otherwise isolated. It provides a way for one to more easily make a journey from one to the other. At its best, chaplaincy offers a bridge between culture and faith, providing care at times when people are devoid of hope, lacking faith or absent from the church for a variety of reasons. While there is a recognition that a significant number of people a chaplain comes across will have little connection with faith, the starting point of Christian chaplaincy is connection with people, with the ultimate aim to help them connect with Christ.

At a time when statistics show that there are fewer people in the pews of many congregations on Sundays, the ministry of chaplaincy offers point of connection with a broad spectrum of people in the world around us. In the words of Victoria Slater, in her helpful book entitled *Chaplaincy Ministry and the Mission of the Church*, “at a cultural moment when the institutional church finds it hard to reach the majority of people who may be open to God... but closed to institutional belonging, chaplaincy seems to be flourishing through its ability to meet and minister with people where they are in the midst of their daily lives.”

(c) **An ambassador: Recognised representatives**

The role of an ambassador is to act as an official representative of a government or organisation, often far away from where they know as home. Ambassadors work on the terms of the environment they are in, but must also represent well their sending body.

Similarly, a chaplain has been sent by the Church to be its representative within an institution. This may involve holding the role of spiritual care-giver in tension with the need to act as representatives of the church more generally and a denomination more specifically. As well as helping people to navigate the challenges

of life, this may also involve listening to the pain of their previous experiences, at times even with the church. With this comes both the responsibility of effectively representing the church, while listening to hurts or complaints of people's experiences of the church.

As ambassadors of Christ and his church, chaplains are not at liberty to do things that the church does not permit. Within some settings, there can be a pressure on chaplains to act independently and please people, but there is a responsibility to hold to the Reformed standards, while maintaining presence and relationship.

The ethos of chaplaincy

Professional: It should go without saying that the role of a Presbyterian chaplain should involve conducting oneself in a professional and credible manner, including operating within the set-parameters, working the expected hours of the post (particularly where remuneration is given), being a valued colleague, reporting to superiors effectively and generally contributing to making the environment they are in a better place.

Collaborative: In most settings, chaplains form part of inter-denominational and multi-disciplinary teams, which includes people of many faith backgrounds and worldviews, who collaborate together in their work. This requires an appreciation of ecclesiological breadth, while also being sure of the value of the Reformed tradition. It also requires humility, knowing that a chaplain will not seek to solve every problem but work alongside others to offer care and support in holistic ways.

Relational: Chaplaincy involves being present with people in significant seasons. One chaplain described it as “the ministry of loitering with intent!” A chaplain at their best is a non-anxious presence; one who draws alongside patients, inmates, students or staff, discerning how best to provide appropriate support through the use of God's word and prayer. This requires taking time, rather than merely ticking off lists to visit, which may even create some tension both internally for a chaplain and externally for an institution.

Intentional: By nature, chaplaincy involves being invited in to counsel, to converse or to care. However, a chaplain should be intentional, seeking to show Christ-like care to people in their every-day situations, some of which may be challenging or complex. It will require intentionality on the part of the chaplain to point people to Jesus according to their circumstances from first encounter to last by presence, prayer and Scripture.

Spirit-led: Chaplains should be aware that they carry the presence of God with them into every situation. One chaplain described their work as seeking to be “spirit-led, where there might be certain short-term, even opportunistic encounters, that means one must seek to ‘strike when the iron is hot’, while also building bridges and developing relationships in an ongoing way.” These might be identified as “Kairos” moments – opportunities to make the most of (Ephesians 5:16).

Formal: Some chaplains are responsible for providing services of worship within a recognised chapel or at marked occasions. For example, one Presbyterian chaplain leads 3 services each Sunday for separate groups of people. Therefore, chaplaincy is about more than relationship, presence and pastoral care, but through services of worship, significant opportunities are available for God's Word to be shared. While chaplains minister through deed, a significant aspect of their ministry is also through the Word, both formally and informally. However, while some chaplains hold denominational roles, they are available to those from every background, there to listen and earn the trust to share.

Culturally aware: While the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has helpfully categorised chaplaincy as missional and placed it within the remit of the Council for Mission in Ireland, there is a tension to be found in being clearly missional, while also understanding that chaplaincy is something more than evangelism. This will involve avoiding the dangers of overt proselytisation at inappropriate times or settings. In other words, it is vital that chaplains talk about Jesus, but also know how and when to do so. Chaplains will develop good cultural awareness, navigating their environment with wisdom and discernment.

All People: Chaplains must ensure they are available to all, regardless of faith or background, seeking to be accessible, approachable and respectful, in reaching out as 'good news people' to everyone they encounter.

The Church's role in chaplaincy

Due to changing circumstances, there is a sense that the church needs to consider its role in chaplaincy in aspects of involvement, training, endorsement, and support.

Involvement

The growth in generic chaplaincy roles particularly within healthcare, means that appointments to chaplaincy are often made directly by health trusts rather than the church. It is now less common for chaplains to be employed simply on the basis of their status within the church, with formal qualifications and previous experience now being pre-requisites for many chaplaincy roles. In light of this changing trajectory, it may be necessary for the Council to consider how to signpost potential chaplains to appropriate training in order to enhance the opportunity to access chaplaincy roles as they arise. There is a danger that if the church fails to think upstream and ensure the equipping of its people, that the privileged access once enjoyed as a church to certain chaplaincy roles could gradually close, thus leaving a vacuum for non-Christian voices to fill. It is important to make the most of opportunities while a seat remains at the table.

Training

More specifically on training, a further step might be the development of specific pathways for those who have been suitably appointed and called to begin a journey towards chaplaincy, which may dovetail with a pathway to

ordination, but could also be open to lay ministry, giving consideration to appropriate mechanisms of accountability. Also, given that many ministers serving in congregations take on additional part-time chaplaincy roles, the Council values ways in which the training process for ministry includes relevant material on this aspect of ministry.

Endorsement

With regards to endorsement, when it has involvement in such, the Council should seek to ensure that those appointed have the necessary heart, gifts and skillset for chaplaincy. There is a specialism to this work that requires specific people skills and it is important that chaplaincy is viewed as a positive calling rather than a negative escape from other ministry responsibilities. As chaplains connect with others perhaps primarily through one-to-one encounters, they need to be emotionally intelligent and intuitive in observing body language, assessing a situation and offering an appropriate response. However, the essential quality by which a follower of Jesus is known is love: a Christian chaplain is a loving or comforting presence listening without prejudice, sharing helpful biblical truths, offering prayer or providing practical assistance to meet a particular need. A particular theological perspective isn't always the key defining factor of a chaplain, but a particular heart to care for people is the most important characteristic.

Support

In terms of support, it can at times seem that there is a lack of understanding and awareness within the church in regards to chaplaincy. Slater argues "it remains hidden within the institutional narratives of ministry", which may be true of the PCI where chaplains can at times feel forgotten, overlooked or out of touch. In contrast, it is important to recognise chaplaincy as a frontline ministry that requires the support and resourcing of the church. In fact, it could be argued that within the PCI, chaplains are amongst those working closest both at the frontlines and on the edges of society. Given this, the Council should ensure it stays connected with its chaplains, and with the institutional settings in which they serve, both by way of support and to find ways for the voices of chaplains to be heard. Perhaps more than any, they intrinsically understand best what it means to take their place as a minority within a dominant culture and yet maintain a missional presence.

However, chaplaincy is not a one-person ministry. It is rooted in the Church and local churches are vital in their role in supporting chaplains. Furthermore, congregations and other Christian ministries would do well to join forces with chaplaincy to work together in this increasingly secular setting. This is happening within prison chaplaincy where regular volunteers support the running of an Alpha course. It is seen in rural chaplaincy, with carefully identified volunteers serving alongside the chaplain, and through supporting local congregations to be present at their local annual show. It has developed through university chaplains linking in with Christian students to support their on-campus outreach. It is demonstrated by a healthcare chaplain acting as a key conduit to help

a patient re-connect with their local church. Chaplains need to be able to work with local churches to receive support, as well as signpost people to Christian communities that challenge, nurture support and love them in an ongoing way.

Close

The church is indebted to each of its chaplains who continue to exercise such a valuable and important ministry. The Council is thankful for the work done by all chaplains, recognising the call that they each have to this special sphere of service that reaches into so many sectors of society for Christ. To that end, this report is offered as a vision for and ethos of chaplaincy within today's world, with the prayer that the church would continue to provide, place and support chaplains who effectively engage pastorally, prophetically and missionally in the public square.

Recommendations

1. That chaplaincy continues to be considered an important ministry to be invested in by way of time, personnel and finance.
2. That the Council for Mission in Ireland (CMI) ensure the provision of regular touch-points of support, encouragement and networking for all chaplains who serve within its remit.
3. That the Council make plans to host a conference in the incoming year for all chaplains within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, both those serving under CMI and those in other chaplaincy roles, to share the ethos and headlines of this report.
4. That the Council for Mission in Ireland seek to capture aspects of this report in a more user-friendly way to be shared either via printed material or online platforms.

JUDICIAL COMMISSION

Convener: Rev N.A.L. CAMERON

Secretary: CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NOTE: The Report of the Judicial Commission will be taken in Private Session at 10am on Thursday 12 June 2025. When Ministers and Elders register in person at the Assembly, they will receive a *Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet* which includes reports of the Findings of the Judicial Commission from the last session.

1. In what has been another busy year, the Judicial Commission has had to meet on a number of occasions, and in a number of different permutations and formats, since the last meeting of the General Assembly in June 2024. There were a number of shorter, yet important, meetings held as well as some more substantive meetings, reports of these being outlined below.
2. The Judicial Commission in **early October 2024** considered a Notice of Appeal lodged against a decision of the Presbytery of Down. It agreed, following the recommendation of the Office Bearers, that the appeal should not be heard on the basis of the stated reasons of appeal submitted not being ‘adequate and appropriate’ to be heard. The outcome of the Judicial Commission’s deliberations can be found in Section 1 (A) of the *Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet*.
3. The Judicial Commission received on **4 September 2024** a Reference under Par 21(1) of the Code from the Dublin and Munster Presbytery. In that Reference the Presbytery sought to refer a complaint from six individuals against an individual to the Judicial Commission for determination. Following consideration, the Judicial Commission, acting under Par 174(d) of the Code resolved to accept the Reference and, taking the place of the court referring and at its request, adjudicate on the complaints. In doing so, the Commission accepted, in the round, the case made by the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster as to its reasons for making the Reference under Par 21(1) of the Code. The Judicial Commission met on **Friday 29 November 2024** to consider the complaint and the outcome of the Judicial Commission’s deliberations can be found in Section 1 (B) of the *Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet*.
4. The Judicial Commission met on **Wednesday 2 April 2025** to consider an appeal lodged against a decision of the Presbytery of Dublin and Munster. The outcome of the Judicial Commission’s deliberations can be found in Section 1 (C) of the *Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet*.
5. The Judicial Commission in mid-April 2025 considered a Notice of Appeal lodged against a decision of the Presbytery of Iveagh. The outcome of the Judicial Commission’s deliberations can be found in Section 1 (D) of the *Confidential Supplementary Report Booklet*.

Barrier Act, Republished Code and Judicial Guidelines

6. The Judicial Commission at its meeting on **Wednesday 2 April 2025** noted that all Presbyteries had voted to approve the Republished Code (see Appendix 1). Therefore, a resolution is appended to publish a new Code on 1 January 2026.
7. The Judicial Commission is grateful to a small number of people who have worked tirelessly over recent years to bring the Code Republishing project to this stage. It expresses the thanks of the Church to each member of the Panel and in particular to its Convener, Rev Dr Donald Watts, the joint Secretaries, the Rev Jim Stothers and the Rev Dr David Allen, the General Assembly Solicitor, Mr Stephen Gowdy and to the Clerk.
8. In light of a new Code being published, the Commission has appointed a small Task Group to update the Commission's Judicial Guidance Booklet. This Task Group will begin work once the 2025 General Assembly agree to authorise the publication of the new 2026 Code and is made up of the Moderator and Clerk of Assembly and the Convener of the Judicial Commission, along with the Deputy Clerk, the Rev Jim Stothers, the Rev Dr Jonathan Curry and the General Assembly Solicitor.

JUDICIAL COMMISSION APPENDIX 1

Barrier Act – Presbytery Responses regarding the Draft Republished Code

	Presbytery	Voting – Figures Oct 24		
		For	Against	Abstentions
1.	ARDS	43	0	
2.	ARMAGH	29	0	
3.	BALLYMENA	31	1	
4.	N BELFAST	33	0	
5.	S BELFAST	18	0	
6.	E BELFAST	34	0	
7.	CARRICKFERGUS	22	0	
8.	COLERAINE AND LIMAVADY	39	1	
9.	DERRY AND DONEGAL	36	5	1
10.	DOWN	28	0	
11.	DROMORE	28	0	
12.	DUBLIN AND MUNSTER	31	0	
13.	IVEAGH	38	0	
14.	MONAGHAN	20	0	
15.	NEWRY	25	0	
16.	OMAGH	21	11	
17.	ROUTE	29	1	
18.	TEMPLEPATRICK	19	0	
19.	TYRONE	26	1	

SPECIAL JUDICIAL COMMISSION

Convener: Rev NORMAN A.L. CAMERON

Secretary: CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. It was not necessary for the Special Judicial Commission to meet.

COMMISSION ON APPLICATIONS

Convener: CLERK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

1. It was not necessary for the Commission on Applications to meet.

COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY

Convener: Rev ANDREW FAULKNER

Secretary: Rev Dr DAVID ALLEN

Convener's Introduction

1. This has been a year where some key personnel have moved on from their roles within the Council and the College.
2. The Council is grateful that Dr Desi Alexander has agreed to the role of Senior Research Fellow in Biblical Studies in his retirement. Desi's work with our students has been wonderfully well received for many years and the Council is thankful for his service to the Church as it prays that God continues to use him in his academic writing in the future.
3. Dr David Allen has been an invaluable asset to the work of the Council, first as Dean of Ministerial Students and then as Secretary to the Council as Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly. His wisdom, his work and his passion for the work of ministry in the church have been so much appreciated. While he will be much missed, the Council welcomes Rev Peter Gamble to his new role and looks forward to what he will bring to this Council's work as its new Secretary.
4. Finally, Rev David Leach has relinquished his role as Professor of Ministry and Director of the Institute for Ministry to take up the pastoral charge of Portrush. David's aptitude for his position in Union College, his relational skills with the students and his enthusiasm for training ministers for our denomination has been a great blessing to us all. The Council prays on for his continued ministry in the coming years.
5. The Council's work has continued through its committees and panels.

MINISTERIAL STUDIES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

6. In the autumn of 2024, seven students commenced training for Ordained Ministry. There are currently 20 Ministry Students at Union Theological College.
7. At its meeting on 20 March, the Ministerial Studies and Development Committee agreed to a request from Student for the Ministry, Joanne Calvert, for her to defer commencing her studies at Union College for a second year.

8. Fifteen applicants for Ordained Ministry attended UTC for final interviews on Monday 14 April and Tuesday 15 April 2025. They were interviewed by the following panels:
Stephen Lowry (Chairperson), Sam Finlay (Chairperson), Angus Stewart (Chairperson), Stephen McNie (Chairperson), Peter Fleming, Barry McCroskery, Deborah Webster, Elizabeth Stewart, Graeme Kennedy, Stephen Lockington, Adrian McLernon, Lorna Curry, Robin Aicken, Mairisine Stanfield, Alistair McCracken, Paula Burrows, Jim King, Gabrielle Farquhar, Mary Alexander and Robin Brown.
9. As a result, 12 applicants are being nominated to the General Assembly to commence training for Ordained Ministry.
10. Of the 15 applicants, 2 have requested flexible pathways, 2 have requested deferral, and 2 have requested permission to study outside of UTC.
11. Three applicants are not being recommended to the General Assembly. One applicant availed themselves of a pastoral conversation. No reviews were requested by Presbyteries.
12. The monthly Licentiate Training Programme has been ongoing and has included sessions on Pastoral-Professional Boundaries, Safeguarding, Hospice Chaplaincy, Rural Chaplaincy, 'First among Equals' (working collaboratively with a Kirk Session), 'Making Progress' (in grace and gifting), Pastoral Visitation, 'From the pew to the pulpit - motivating a congregation for global mission' alongside the regular 'Stay Fresh' small-group pastoral interactions and the presentation of Licentiate Projects.
13. One Licentiate became eligible for call on 1 June 2025, a further 5 Licentiates will become eligible for call on 1 September 2025. The Committee is grateful to God for his faithfulness in continuing to raise up Ministers of Word and Sacrament.
14. The licentiatehip of Mr Stephen McCleery, Licentiate Assistant, has been suspended by Route Presbytery.
15. The Post-Ordination Training Conference was held on 20–22 May 2025. Helen Thorne-Allenson, Louise MacMillan and Steve Midgely, from Biblical Counselling UK, were the contributors. The focus was on self-care and 39 ministers attended.
16. The Pre-Retirement Conference continues to give ministers and spouses an opportunity to reflect on how they might 'finish well', and plays a significant role in the Ministerial Development Programme. Two Pre-Retirement Conferences were held, one in November 2024 and the other in March 2025. Rev Alistair and Mrs Angela Bill have stepped down from facilitating the Conference and gratitude is expressed to them for their faithful service. Conference facilitators Rev Robert and Mrs Christine Bell have now been joined by Rev Robert and Mrs Christine McMullan.

EDDIE CHESTNUTT, Convener

RECEPTION OF MINISTERS AND LICENTIATES COMMITTEE

17. The Committee met twice since the 2024 General Assembly.

Enquiries

18. Fourteen people contacted the RMLC during the year seeking information about transferring to the ministry of PCI. The Committee has been speaking with eight enquirers who have followed up with a clear intention of desiring to pursue the matter.

Transferring Ministers

19. Rev Mariann Gilicze, an ordained minister in the Hungarian Reformed Church, serving as Assistant Minister in Gilnahirk Presbyterian Church since December 2020, was granted eligibility for a call in February 2023 and received a call from First Lisburn Presbyterian Church in March 2025.
20. Rev Elyse McCroskery, an ordained minister in the Protestant Evangelical Church of Timor, serving as Assistant Minister in Windsor Presbyterian Church since June 2022, was granted eligibility for a call from June 2024.
21. Dr Stephen Moore, originally from Northern Ireland, theologically trained at Oak Hill College, London and currently teaching in Union College, was received as a Transferring Licentiate and commenced an 18-month assistantship in Hill St Presbyterian Church in July 2023.
22. Rev Dr Graham Shearer, an ordained English Baptist (FIEC) minister, currently serving as a Lecturer in Union College, was received as a Transferring Minister and commenced an 18-month assistantship in Lowe Memorial Presbyterian Church in May 2024.
23. Mr Lucas Da Costa, originally from Brazil, theologically trained at Union School of Theology (Open University) and licensed by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales, was received as a Transferring Licentiate and commenced a 36-month assistantship in First Saintfield Presbyterian Church in September 2024.
24. Mr Matthew Kirk, originally from Northern Ireland, and licensed by the International Presbyterian Church was interviewed in September 2024 and received as a Transferring Licentiate. He will begin a 36-month assistantship when a suitable placement is found.

Requests for Permission to Preach in Vacancies

25. At the request of the Presbytery of Derry and Donegal, Rev Jonathan Dennis (Presbyterian Church in Canada) was interviewed on 18 February 2025 and has been granted permission to preach in vacancies throughout that Presbytery.

Request for Restoration of Status under Code Par 219(5)

26. None.

Review of Procedures for Transferring Ministers

27. A comprehensive review of all procedures for prospective Transferring Ministers from the point of initial enquiry through to installation in a PCI congregation is ongoing and it is hoped this will be completed later this year.

LACHLAN WEBSTER, Convener

UNION THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

28. Convinced of the important and strategic place Union Theological College has in the life and mission of the Church, the Committee is pleased to report another year of encouragements and excellence. Thanks are expressed to all who have contributed to the life and work of the College, not least staff and students. The Church is very well served by the hard work of faculty. This has been a demanding year, with stretched resources. The atmosphere throughout the College reflects good working relationships, which in turn makes for a pleasant place to work, study and visit.

Teaching

29. The College continues to fulfil the roles entrusted to it by the Assembly – the training of ministers for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland; the delivery of a BA in Theology, validated by St Mary’s University, Twickenham; and post-graduate programmes awarded by the Presbyterian Theological Faculty Ireland.
30. It is a cause of great thanksgiving that the graduation of the first BA undergraduates is due to take place this summer.
31. It is hoped that this will provide benefit to the students concerned, but it will also allow more effective promotion and recruitment, as the good experiences and outcomes of students can be shared, with the prayer that this will encourage more to apply in coming years. The BA in Theology is a wonderful course to recommend within the Church.

Reviews

32. The Committee recognises that many aspects of Union’s life and work are under review as part of the Structures and Resources Review, in particular the training of ministers and the UTC building itself. This has resulted in a period of uncertainty. It is inescapable that this is having an effect on the management of the College and, more directly, on staff and students. In

light of this, of necessity, some decision-making has to be short-term, but there is the underlying hope that the end result will be an exciting future for the College through which it can be used for the Church and Kingdom.

Staffing

33. Prof Gordon Campbell, Professor of New Testament, retired in August 2024, and has taken up an honorary role as Senior Research Fellow in New Testament. The Committee is thankful for Gordon's willingness to remain active in the life of the College.
34. Prof David Leach, Professor of Ministry and Director of the Institute for Ministry, received and accepted a call to Portrush, being installed on 2 May. The Council extends heartfelt thanks to David for his service in the College, Council and Church, and prays that the Lord will bless his ministry in Portrush.
35. Dr Desi Alexander has indicated his intention to resign in August 2025 from his role as Director of Postgraduate Studies and Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies. Desi took up his present appointment in 2009 and his excellence in scholarship has been a blessing to students and to the wider Church. The Committee wishes him the Lord's blessing as he prepares for retirement.
36. It continues to be challenging to recruit administrative staff. We are grateful for employees who have been recruited on a temporary basis, their gifts and commitment to the work has been a benefit to the College.

Property

37. Following the report of the Building Condition Survey, the General Assembly has established a group to look at the building as part of the Structures and Resources Review.
38. Repairs have been carried out to Room 3, with the ceiling being reinforced as a result of the weight of books above it in the Library.

Finance

39. The Committee is extremely appreciative of the extension of the transitional financial arrangements that have been put in place to support Union and for the annual grant from the United Appeal.
40. The College continues to experience financial challenges.
41. Expenditure is being controlled as far as possible: however, increases in salaries and inflation lie beyond the control of the Committee.
42. In addition, income has been lower than anticipated, primarily due to lower numbers of ministry students and BA students than expected – the Committee is taking steps to address the latter.

JOHN KIRKPATRICK, Convener

STUDENTS' BURSARY FUND

43. The Students' Bursary Fund exists to make financial provision for the Church's students for the ordained ministry during their time of study. In the academic year beginning September 2024, 20 students are in receipt of grants. The cost to the fund of the grants, fees and other expenses for this academic year is in the region of £413,500.
44. The Students' Bursary Fund receives its income from offerings at services of licensing of probationers, of ordination and installation of ministers and other special services, and through personal and congregational donations, as well as congregational assessment. The support of the Church in these ways is gratefully acknowledged. Those who have responsibility for planning a service of licensing, ordination and installation, etc. are asked to ensure full use is made of the Students' Bursary Fund literature, especially the Gift Aid envelope. The literature is available from Assembly Buildings. Experience suggests that when the literature is made available at an earlier time, such as on the Sunday before the special service, those attending are more likely to make use of the Gift Aid Scheme. It also may be a help to indicate in announcements – and perhaps on invitations – that, at the service, an offering will be collected for the Students' Bursary Fund.

ADRIAN MOFFETT, Convener

APS/AMS PANEL

45. **Accredited Preacher Scheme (APS)**
At the time of writing, the current cohort of accredited preachers in training either are nearing completion of their placements or have completed them already. The accreditation service is planned for 21 September. In the autumn, it is planned to provide refresher training for existing accredited preachers. This will likely take the form of a Saturday morning conference with a theme along the lines of, 'How to understand and preach the prophets.' It is envisaged offering a course for new applicants in 2026.
46. **Auxiliary Ministry Scheme (AMS)**
For the first time in a number of years, a new auxiliary ministry position has been filled since the last meeting of the General Assembly. Should this prove to be the beginning of a renewed interest in such ministry across the denomination, the Panel will be glad to respond fittingly.
47. **Sharing God's Word**
A pilot of this new course was held in Lowe Memorial in the autumn of 2024 and attracted a diverse group of participants. This pilot was received very positively, and so production of the final course is moving ahead. It is hoped that the materials (including both video and written content) may be available by September.

ANDREW CONWAY, Convener

DEACONESS SELECTION AND TRAINING PANEL

48. Recruitment and Selection of a new cohort of students

The Recruitment and Selection of a new cohort of two student deaconesses concluded in March with Sonya Boal (Whiteabbey) and Olivia Smith (First Dunboe) being recommended for acceptance as student deaconesses.

49. The anticipated start date for training this new cohort of deaconesses is September 2025.

ANGUS STEWART, Convener

CONCILIATION PANEL

50. Introduction

The past year was a period of continued engagement in conciliation efforts within the Church, focusing on mediation, conflict resolution, and training. The work of conciliation has been instrumental in fostering understanding, reconciliation, and spiritual renewal within various church bodies. This report outlines the ongoing work of conciliation, including current cases, training events, and the development of conciliators.

51. Ongoing Conciliation Cases Throughout the Year

The Panel has handled several conciliation cases across different congregations. These cases have varied in complexity, addressing issues such as interpersonal conflicts, leadership disputes, and theological disagreements.

- (a) **Leadership Disputes:** Some cases involve disagreements between church leaders, including elders, ministers, and session members, regarding governance decisions and doctrinal interpretation. The conciliation team facilitated conciliation sessions, ensuring that all perspectives were heard and resolutions aligned with biblical principles.
- (b) **Congregational Conflicts:** Some congregations faced tensions due to misunderstandings, historical grievances, or differing visions for ministry. Conciliators conducted listening sessions, encouraged constructive dialogue, and assisted in developing reconciliation plans.
- (c) **Interpersonal Issues:** Cases involved strained relationships between individual members often requiring additional support, and follow-up sessions to rebuild trust and foster forgiveness.
- (d) **Ongoing Cases:** While many conflicts were successfully resolved, some cases remain in progress, requiring continuous intervention and prayerful discernment. Follow-up meetings are scheduled to support all involved in reconciliation efforts and offer guidance when required.

52. Reconciliation and Biblical Conciliation Training (September 2024)

This is a theological and practical training event that highlights the role of scripture in conciliation. The workshop was scheduled for November 2024 however, unforeseen circumstances resulted in it being rescheduled. The workshop will focus on Biblical case studies, principles of forgiveness, and how to apply Christian mediation techniques in real situations. This theological and practical training event will emphasise the role of Scripture in conciliation.

53. Training for Conciliators

Recognising the importance of developing skilled conciliators, the training programme for conciliators continues. The training curriculum will be structured to enhance the knowledge and practical skills required for effective conciliation within the church setting.

- (a) **Conciliation Techniques:** This session will focus on deepening understanding of conciliation methodologies, equipping conciliators with negotiation skills, and training them in handling highly sensitive disputes.
- (b) **Case Study Analysis:** Participants will examine real-world cases from past conflicts to identify successful strategies and avoid common pitfalls in mediation.
- (c) **Role-Playing Exercises:** Practical sessions will encourage conciliators to engage in simulated conflict resolution scenarios, allowing them to practice applying Biblical mediation principles in challenging situations.
- (d) **Supervision:** All conciliators will be paired with experienced mentors to receive guidance, feedback, and continuous development throughout the year.

54. Conclusion

The past year has demonstrated the ongoing need for conciliation within the Church, as well as the effectiveness of structured training programmes. The positive outcomes of conciliation reaffirm the value of this ministry in promoting harmony and spiritual renewal. Looking ahead, the Panel remains committed to strengthening the work of conciliation, expanding training opportunities, and ensuring that church leaders and members are well-equipped to handle conflicts in a Christ-centred manner.

55. Sincere gratitude is expressed to all conciliators, trainers, and participants who have contributed to this essential work. Through God's guidance and the dedication of his people, the Panel trusts that its efforts will continue to bear fruit in building peace and unity within the church community of PCI.

PAUL JAMIESON, Convener

RECOGNISED MINISTRIES

Rev Dr Ruth Patterson, Restoration Ministries, writes:

56. Restoration Ministries continues in quiet and little ways to follow the vision that birthed us into being in 1988. Reconciliation is no longer at the top of people's agenda, if it ever was. Ecumenism has become a tired and, to many, an irrelevant word. A world seized by uncertainty and unspeakable anguish leaves many feeling confused and powerless. Yet we are encouraged by the increasing numbers coming for spiritual direction, by several thriving Faith and Friendship Groups and by the growing interest in Centering or Contemplative Prayer, as well as continuing requests to facilitate retreat days. We hold fast to the vision of the Church as Beloved Community, and that unity is always diversity embraced by Love.

PASTORAL CARE OF MINISTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES PANEL

57. During the past year, the Council was pleased to appoint Mrs Sonia Kane as Convener of the Panel.
58. Thanks are expressed to Rev Niall Lockhart for the leadership he gave during his tenure, and prayerful good wishes are extended to Sonia as she takes up this valuable work.

APPENDIX 1**SCHEDULE OF STUDENTS**

ARDS	Jack Neilly	Union
ARMAGH	Alex Richardson	Union
NORTH BELFAST	Dave Dickinson	Union
EAST BELFAST	Peter Huey	Union
	Karen Jardine	Union
	Ben Kirkwood	Union
	Peter MacMillan	Union
	Stephen McCombe	Union
COLERAINE AND LIMAVADY	Thomas Black	Union
	Joshua Lowry	Union
DROMORE	Nathan Donnell	Union
	Ashley Parks	Union
DUBLIN AND MUNSTER	Cillian McNamara	Union
IVEAGH	James Burke	Union
	Robert McClughan	Union
NEWRY	Mark Annett	Union
	Matthew Banks	Union
	Alan Hanna	Union
TEMPLEPATRICK	Christine Craig	Union
TYRONE	Colin McKay	Union

RESOLUTIONS

GENERAL COUNCIL

GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE (INITIAL REPORT)

Tuesday morning.

1. That the Draft Order of Business for the 2025 General Assembly be approved.
2. That the 'Guide to Assembly Procedure' (yellow pages) be approved with the appropriate General Assembly Standing Orders suspended where necessary to facilitate alternative presentations etc.
3. That at the 2025 General Assembly, and all subsequent General Assemblies, substantive proposed amendments, which have not been submitted to the Business Committee for licensing one week in advance of the Assembly meeting, will only be permitted, at the discretion of the Moderator, if they genuinely arise in the course of the debate, or if they relate to additional resolutions tabled in the Supplementary Business.
4. That a grant of up to £25,000 be made from the Incidental Fund to the Arrangements Panel of the General Assembly Business Committee.
5. That the Initial Report of the General Assembly Business Committee be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 1

2pm Tuesday afternoon

General Assembly Structures and Resources and Review Panel

6. That the General Assembly note the Guiding Principles outlined in the Report of the General Assembly Structures and Resources and Review Panel and, as a result:
 - (a) **The General Assembly affirm that** the primary function of its central structures is to support the overall mission of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. As a result, services provided by those central structures should align with the denomination's mission.
 - (b) **The General Assembly therefore further affirm that:**
 - (i) The local congregation, led by presbyters, is the primary unit of mission and ministry, operating under the oversight of the courts of the Church.
 - (ii) Decisions regarding local mission and ministry should be made at congregational level whenever possible, with oversight provided by presbyteries and the General Assembly.

- (iii) The role of the General Assembly is to provide oversight and to envision, resource and support local congregations and presbyteries in fulfilling their mission and ministry. This will include encouraging participation in wider mission and ministry, normally beyond the scope of any one congregation or presbytery, with the General Assembly setting the vision and providing oversight of the delivery of this.
 - (iv) The General Assembly must prioritise such work that only the church in mission and ministry is best placed to do.
 - (v) The General Assembly must model Kingdom values in its mission and ministry, pursuing its vocation to influence both society and government in line with those values, especially as an advocate for the vulnerable and the marginalised.
 - (vi) The General Assembly must be courageous and always follow the evident prompting of the Holy Spirit.
7. That the General Assembly note the ‘signposts’ for the future work of the panel in relation to General Assembly structures, as outlined in Section B of the Report of the General Assembly Structures and Resources and Review Panel.
8. That on the recommendation of the General Assembly Structures and Resources and Review Panel, the General Assembly agree:
- (a) that classification decisions for income, investments and other assets be determined at the overall organisational level rather than at Council level;
 - (b) that the Finance Panel of the Support Services Committee, in consultation with the auditors, revise the accounting policies to reflect this alternative approach;
 - (c) that to minimise the potential impact on existing financial plans or budgets, any assets which will be re-classified by the revised approach are treated initially as Designated funds in line with their existing restriction rather than General funds.

General

9. That Section 1 of the General Council Report, with the exception of the Initial Report of the General Assembly Business Committee, be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 2

4.30pm Tuesday afternoon

United Appeal

10. That the United Appeal and Grants for 2026 be as set out in the Report of the United Appeal Committee (see pages 33–36).

Support Services

11. That for 2025, the Assessments Rates, along with the estimated allocation of funds, be as set out in Appendix 1 to the Report of the Support Services Committee (see page 42).
12. That the rate of assessment for the Pension Fund be set at 17.5% of stipend paid in the year.
13. That the General Council is given delegated authority to amend salary bands and levels and deal with associated issues.
14. That the 2025 budgeted expenditure for the Incidental Fund be as set out in Appendix 3 to the Report of the Support Services Committee (see page 47)
15. That for the ensuing year, references to ‘age 65’ in the rules of Prolonged Disability Fund be interpreted as referring to ‘normal retirement age’ rather than any specific age and that notice is given to make this change permanent at the 2026 General Assembly.
16. That under Par 223(3) of the Code, leave to retire pre-66 be granted for:
 - Rev Jackie Spence (Upper & Lower Clonaneese), 21 September 2025
 - Rev (S.J.) Mervyn Lindsay (Pomeroy & Sandholes), on or after 12 January 2026
 - Rev Stephen P Moore (Gilnahirk), on or after 15 September 2025

PCI Pension Scheme Review Panel

17. That the recommendations of the PCI Pension Scheme Review Panel be adopted, as outlined in paragraph 8 on page 55 of its Report.

General

18. That Section 2 of the General Council Report be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 3

Wednesday morning

General Assembly Advisory Committee

19. That the Appointment Process (GAAC Appendix 1), Job Description (GAAC Appendix 1a) and Personnel Specification (GAAC Appendix 1b) for the post of Clerk Designate of the General Assembly and General Secretary Designate of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland be agreed.
20. That the following Guidelines be adopted and provided to Kirk Sessions regarding the admission to baptism of the children of unmarried couples:
 - (a) Sacramental discipline remains the responsibility of the Kirk Session, (Code Para. 39(2)). In all difficult or complex cases of requests for baptism, the minister should bring the matter before the Kirk Session for consideration and decision.
 - (b) The children of unmarried couples should normally not be baptised, unless there are clear exceptional pastoral circumstances which the Kirk Session can justify to a superior court, if required.
 - (c) Pastoral sensitivity should always be shown while engaging with unmarried couples seeking baptism for their children, with a view to encouraging them towards Christian marriage.
21. That, as an interim measure for the 2025 World Development Appeal and any Moderator's Appeal, a change is made to current practice to allow congregations, if they so desire, to specify to which development agency (Christian Aid or Tear Fund) their donation be sent, and that no differences in the amounts allocated between agencies be "made up" centrally.
22. That the General Assembly approve the "Affirmation of Fraternal and Confessional Relations between the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (USA)" (see GAAC Appendix 5, page 82).

Communications Strategy

23. That the Report on the Communications Strategy be received and the recommendations, as outlined in Appendix A of report (page 95), be adopted.

Guysmere Development Panel

24. That the report of the Guysmere Development Panel be received and the steps outlined noted.

General

25. That Section 3 of the General Council Report be received.

GENERAL COUNCIL – SECTION 4

Thursday Morning

Nominations Committee

26. That the following resignations be accepted, and appointments made:
- (a) the resignation of Mr David Thomson as Convener of the Support Service Committee [under General Council], that he be thanked for his services, and that Mr Hugo Wilson be appointed in his place.
 - (b) the resignation of Rev Stephen Richmond as Convener of the Congregational Witness Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev Jonny McKane be appointed in his place.
 - (c) the resignation of Rev Jane Nelson as Convener of the Programme, Finance and Coordination Committee [under CCLW], that she be thanked for her services, and that Mr Colin Neill be appointed in her place.
 - (d) the resignation of Rev Philip McCrea as Convener of the Congregational Life Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that Rev James Rogers be appointed in his place.
 - (e) the resignation of Rev Stephen Lowry as Convener of the Disability Services Committee, that he be thanked for his services, and that _____ be appointed in his place.

General

27. That Section 4 of the General Council Report be received.

PRESBYTERY REPORTS

Tuesday Morning

1. That the Reports of Presbyteries be received

COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL WITNESS

Tuesday morning.

1. That the General Assembly commend the work of Council for Social Witness managers in securing significant improvement in the Council's financial performance in 2024 and welcomes the Council's efforts to ensure that the outstanding issues are robustly addressed;
2. That the General Assembly welcome the commitment of the Council for Social Witness to ensure services that distinctively reflect the Christian ethos of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland are available for people with complex needs;

3. That the General Assembly approve the draft policies on Adult Safeguarding (Northern Ireland), Adult Safeguarding (Republic of Ireland), Child Safeguarding (Northern Ireland), Child Safeguarding (Republic of Ireland) and Criminal Vetting Checks.
4. That the Report of the Council for Social Witness be received.

General Assembly Trustees

Tuesday afternoon

1. That the recommendations for distribution of funds be adopted in relation to:
 - (a) the Mrs A.M. Davidson Trust;
 - (b) the Sir Wm.V. McCleery Trust;
 - (c) the Miss Ida Mary McGeown Trust;
 - (d) the Miss Irene Scott Trust;
 - (e) the Victor Morrow Trust.
2. That the General Assembly agree to join the Church Investors Group.
3. That the Report of the Trustees of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland be received.

COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Tuesday evening

1. That the General Assembly:
 - (a) welcome the long-awaited publication of the Special Educational Needs Reform Agenda in Northern Ireland and strongly encourages the implementation of the delivery plans as a matter of urgency;
 - (b) recognise and affirm the vital work carried out in special schools across the island of Ireland and encourage congregations to make real and meaningful links with such schools in their local area;
 - (c) commend the ongoing commitment and dedication of those who serve on schools' Boards of Governors (NI) and on Boards of Management (RoI) and encourage all Presbyterians with an interest in the education of children and young people to prayerfully consider being actively involved in these roles.
2. That the General Assembly express grave concern regarding the proposed Private Members' Bill on 'Banning Conversion Therapy Practices in Northern Ireland.'

3. That the General Assembly:
 - (a) encourage prayer that ‘Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill will fail to pass the report stage of the parliamentary process when it returns to the House of Commons for debate’;
 - (b) encourage members of PCI to write to local MPs, TDs, Senators and members of the House of Lords calling on both Irish and UK governments to prioritise investment in and the provision of, the best possible palliative care with the utmost urgency;
 - (c) welcome the establishment of the ‘Living and Dying Well’ resource hub and commend its use to the denomination;
 - (d) commend the work carried out by hospices, palliative care inpatient units, hospital palliative care teams, and community palliative care teams;
 - (e) urge the NI Heath Committee to bring forward a comprehensive ‘Palliative Care Strategy’ for NI with the utmost expediency, underpinned by a Palliative Care Policy;
 - (f) call on Northern Ireland MPs to take urgent action to extend the exemptions from the proposed increased employer’s national insurance contributions set out in the October 2024 UK budget to hospices, residential care and nursing homes (social care settings) in line with other parts of the NHS;
 - (g) encourage ministers to set aside a Sunday annually to consider the importance of holistic end-of-life care, affirming the innate value and dignity of every human life from conception to death, and to pray for those who resource and deliver essential palliative care services in our communities.
4. That the General Assembly encourage the Council for Public Affairs through its Republic of Ireland Panel to engage with the Programme for Government in Ireland, on issues such as education, housing and migration.
5. That the Report of the Council for Public Affairs be received.

MEMORIALS

Wednesday morning

Memorial of the Kirk Session of Carnmoney

1. That the Memorial of the Kirk Session of Carnmoney be received and that its prayer be granted.

Memorial of the Kirk Session of First Bangor

1. That the Memorial of the Kirk Session of First Bangor be received and that its prayer be granted.

Memorials of the Presbytery of Armagh and of the Presbytery of Down

1. That the General Assembly agree that the broad issues included in the Memorial of the Armagh Presbytery should be considered.
2. That the General Assembly agree that the broad issues included in the Memorial of the Down Presbytery should be considered.
3. That the General Assembly agree that the broad issues contained in the Memorials of the Armagh and Down Presbyteries should be considered together by an Ad-Hoc Panel – this to include the consideration of what is meant by ordination and the offices to which ordination should apply within PCI, including the role of any such ordained office.
4. That the Ad-Hoc Panel regarding the Memorials of the Armagh and Down Presbyteries should consist of:
 - Moderator and Clerk of Assembly; General Council Convener
 - Rev Dr Ben Walker (Convener)
 - Three members of the Doctrine Committee (nominated by its Convener)
 - Two members of the Council for Training in Ministry (nominated by its Business Committee)
 - Two members of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness (nominated by its Coordination Committee)
 - Two members of the Council for Mission in Ireland (nominated by its Business Panel)
5. Up to two additional members (if necessary for balance, nominated by the Convener of the General Council).

LINKAGE COMMISSION

Wednesday morning

1. That the revised bounds for the congregation of Mersey Street, as set out in Appendix 1, be approved.
2. That the Report of the Linkage Commission, with the exception of the report of Mergers, and the Reconfiguration Committee, be received.

Wednesday afternoon

3. That the congregation of Townhill, Portglenone be merged into the congregation of First Portglenone on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission.
4. That the congregation of Croaghmore be merged into the congregation of Toberkeigh on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission.

5. That the congregation of Ballynahatty & Creevan be merged into the congregation of Fintona on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission.
6. That the congregation of Newington be merged into the Presbytery of North Belfast on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission.
7. That the congregation of Taughmonagh be merged into the Presbytery of South Belfast on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission.
8. That the congregation of Killala be dissolved on 31 December 2025, or other suitable date, on Terms set by the Linkage Commission. That the assets realised be distributed according to the rules.
9. That the Report of the Reconfiguration Committee of the Linkage Commission be received.

COUNCIL FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE AND WITNESS

Wednesday morning

1. That the General Assembly encourage congregations to engage with the Present initiative in the year ahead in whatever way seems most suitable to them and to harness the potential it offers to envision and enable the development of their life and witness.
2. That the Report of the Council for Congregational Life and Witness be received.

COUNCIL FOR GLOBAL MISSION

Wednesday morning

1. That the General Assembly give thanks for the dedicated witness and sacrificial service of PCI's global mission workers and encourage the Council to prayerfully reflect on its strategy for resourcing mission engagement, in particular the sending of global mission workers.
2. That the General Assembly give thanks to God for the opportunity to partner in mission with churches, institutions and agencies around the world and commit to pray, especially for those enduring the ongoing impact of war, civil unrest and displacement, and living as persecuted minorities.
3. That the General Assembly give thanks to God for the generosity of congregations and members of PCI in support of the World Development Appeal 2024 and commend the 2025 World Development Appeal to the whole Church.

4. Standing in solidarity with PCI's partners, and recognising the devastating impact on some of the world's poorest people who are least well able to absorb any reduction in aid, the General Assembly call on the UK Government to restore their commitment to international aid spending of 0.7% of Gross National Income.
5. That the Report of the Council for Global Mission be received.

COUNCIL FOR MISSION IN IRELAND

Wednesday evening

1. That the "Church Planting – The Next Decade" report be received and its recommendations adopted, with affirmation of the vision for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to pray for and commit towards seeing at least 10 fully constituted new congregations and at least 10 more church planting projects in the next 10 years.
2. That the General Assembly welcome the "Mission as a Minority" report and approves its recommendations.
3. That the General Assembly note the exit of the congregation of Kilkenny from the Home Mission Development Scheme on 30 June 2025.
4. That the report entitled "Chaplaincy: A Ministry of Presence" be received and the Council be encouraged in the outworking of its recommendations.
5. That the General Assembly give thanks for the work of all our Healthcare, Forces, Prisons, Rural and University Chaplains, recognising their call to this special area of ministry and service.
6. That the Report of the Council for Mission in Ireland be received.

JUDICIAL COMMISSION (IN PRIVATE)

Thursday morning

1. That the General Assembly authorise the publication of the 2026 Book of the Constitution and Government of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (The Code), replacing the previous 1980 Book of the Constitution and Government of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (The Code), and effective from 1 January 2026.
2. That the Report of the Judicial Commission be received.

SPECIAL JUDICIAL COMMISSION (IN PRIVATE)

Thursday morning

1. That the Report of the Special Judicial Commission be received.

COMMISSION ON APPLICATIONS (IN PRIVATE)

Thursday morning

1. That the Report of the Commission on Applications be received.

COUNCIL FOR TRAINING IN MINISTRY

Thursday morning (IN PRIVATE)

1. That the following applicants, their nominations having been sustained by the Council for Training in Ministry, be accepted as Students for the Ordained Ministry, and placed under the care of their Presbyteries:

Applicant	Presbytery
Stuart Balmer	Ards
Calum Coert	Armagh
David Graham	Dromore
Adam Hanna	Newry
Peter Hutchinson	Armagh
Matthew Jackson	Down
Philipp Jaeschke	South Belfast
Josh McCracken	East Belfast
Scott Monteith	East Belfast
Ross Murphy	Dromore
Adam Wallace	Coleraine and Limavady
Wesley Quinn	Route

2. That the following pathways be approved:
 - (a) Calum Coert
 - (i) Follow the regular ministry training pathway
 - (ii) Be recommended to apply for the MDiv at UTC
 - (iii) Any exemptions from CTM modules will be agreed after consultation with the UTC Faculty and the Convener of the Ministerial Studies and Development Committee
 - (iv) Complete the normal student summer placements and a 26-month full-time licentiate ship.

- (b) Adam Hanna
 - (i) Be recommended to apply for an MTh in Reformed Theology (overthree years of study)
 - (ii) Complete the remaining CTM modules in order to satisfy General Assembly requirements:
 - Irish Church History
 - Hebrew
 - Theology for Ministry (audit)
 - Homiletics 2
 - Leading Worship
 - Pastoral Care and Reflective Practice 1 and 2
 - Missional Church
 - Leadership
 - Presentation Skills
 - Interpersonal Skills
 - (iii) Complete the regular student summer placements and a 26-month full-time licentiatehip.
3. That permission be granted to Stuart Balmer and Peter Hutchinson to study at Westminster Theological Seminary on the following terms:
 - (a) Completion of two 12-week student summer placements in Ireland in the summers of 2026 and 2028.
 - (b) Supply the Dean of Ministerial Studies and Development with a statement of the classes proposed to be taken during the following session and receive the consent of the Council. These statements must reach the DMSD not later than the 1 September in any year (Code Par 217.7(a)).
 - (c) Supply a statement that records academic scores and transcripts to the DMSD at the end of each academic year.
 - (d) Return to complete a course of study at Union Theological College for one year (Code Par 217(7)(b) and 217(8)). Concurrent with this, complete a student placement year.
 - (e) Complete a normal 26-month full-time licentiatehip.
 - (f) Report any bursaries received to the convener of the Students' Bursary Fund, in order that appropriate reductions might be made.
4. That permission be given to Matthew Jackson to defer the commencement of his studies for no more than one year.
5. That permission be given to Adam Wallace to defer the commencement of his studies.

Thursday morning (IN PUBLIC)

6. That the assessment for the Students' Bursary Fund be set to raise £450,000.
7. That the Report of the Council for Training in Ministry be received.

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